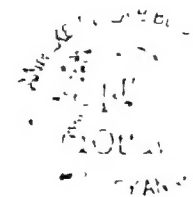


**THE EXPERIENCE OF COUPLES IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS  
WHEN THE WOMAN IS A SURVIVOR OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

Janet Sandra Champion de Crespigny  
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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the  
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my beloved husband Magnus Gunther without whom it would not even have occurred to me to embark on such a task, and who has coaxed and chivied me through the long years that it has taken to complete it.

It is also lovingly dedicated to my children Julian and Harriet who I think are in the process of forgiving me for the many absences of mothering they have endured through their lifetimes.

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### ABSTRACT

Mainstream psychological research has paid insufficient attention to how women sexually abused in childhood live their intimate adult relationships, and even less to the mutual experience of both partners and the potential for healing within relationship. This empirical-phenomenological study is based upon the written and oral accounts of two couples, who had been in committed relationships for at least five years and where the women had been abused by their fathers in childhood. Following the rigorous and systematic phenomenological method devised by Giorgi (1985), the study explicates and articulates the subjective and intersubjective meaning-structures of how these two couples live relationally with the aftermath of child sexual abuse.

The phenomenological analysis resulted in six situated structures for the four individuals and two couples. Further reflection upon these situated structures revealed a matrix of four major interrelated themes common to the experience of both women in our study. These themes were: living a life-world pervaded by embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear; tenuous-being-in-control and being-all-responsible; embodied suffering; and, existential aloneness--the last three were also found to be dialectically related. These themes were interrelated in a compellingly repetitive pattern which further elaborated the temporal dimension of how the women's abusive pasts continue to re-invade their present existences. Three dialectically related

themes emerged for the two men in the study: Caring, feeling-controlled, and putting-aside of self and restriction-of-life-world.

When woven together, the themes for the women and the men formed a matrix of dialectically and/or responsively related themes for the couples. Despite serious difficulties, these couples were managing to preserve the resilient structures of their relationships. Our analysis showed that they were struggling toward subjective and intersubjective transformation. Furthermore, the analysis suggested that the theme of transformation was being manifested through the communication of shared understanding, and through seeking mutuality in caring for the being and becoming of both self and other. The unique findings of this phenomenological study fundamentally extend beyond previous understandings of how the aftermath of child sexual abuse is lived in adult intimate relationships.

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## INTRODUCTION

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
W.B. Yeats (1955)

Nearly forty years after Yeats wrote these lines, they still have much to say to us, living as we do in a world full of violence and fear, where indeed it seems "the centre cannot hold". Historically, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Vietnam, and more recently what has been happening in countries like Bosnia and Rwanda have led to an unparalleled surge of interest in the psychological and social meanings of violence and victimization. Closer to home, a recent survey (Statistics Canada, 1993) indicates that more than half of the women in Canada have experienced physical violence from a man at some time in their lives. In response to this contemporary existential crisis, it has become a matter of urgency for psychologists to understand more about the critical difference between survival and transformation, existence and well-being. This in turn predicates that they begin to pay more attention to the vital importance of close relationships and community as basic requirements for survival and meaning in the lives of human beings.

Eloquent expression of the centrality of human relationships has come from philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Merleau-Ponty and Martin Buber. For Kierkegaard the self is a relationship that

relates to the relationship (Kierkegaard in Mook, 1987b). The interwoven intensity of this conceptualization of the self emphasizes the tenacity with which Kierkegaard's thinking is antithetical to the notion that human life could be anything but relational. The belief that our longing for relationship is present from birth is intrinsic to the work of Martin Buber (1970) who wrote, "In the beginning is the relationship" (p.69). Merleau-Ponty (1962) has described the world as the cradle wherein we find ourselves already related and involved intersubjectively. Our lives, he states, are never lived autonomously but rather in a network of relationships with others--like interwoven threads (Merleau-Ponty in Mook, 1989).

Bowlby (1969), trained in psychoanalysis, came to understand the significance of human relationships in ethological terms and made the strong claim that the need of each human being to develop and maintain a close secure bond with another is fundamental, innate, and essential. Moreover, he stressed that this is not just true for infants and young children. The need for close intimate ties is ongoing and persists through life.

Clinicians and researchers (Herman, Russell & Trocki, 1986) have begun to look more systematically at the extraordinary resilience of human beings, seeking to understand how some people not only survive but are apparently transformed and strengthened in the process of having to deal with misfortune, crisis and trauma. One of the most consistent findings, reported by those who have struggled through times of adversity, is that being in a



close, confiding, mutually supportive, intimate relationship is what helped them most. (Brown & Harris, 1978; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1979; Kessler & Essex, 1982; Reis, 1984). Similarly, there are indications that the unhappily married and those who are not in or have not had close intimate relationships have more difficulty surmounting life's strains and hardships (Flannery, 1990; Gove, Style & Hughes, 1990; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977).

But what if one's earliest relationship was one of violation and betrayal? Does this preclude the possibility of finding and maintaining a close relationship of trust and mutuality as an adult? When a child is sexually abused by a family member, trust, which is seen as the basis of secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969) is violated. The emotional bond is breached and the child's right to optimal development has been denied. Parents and older family members should be responsible for protecting the sexual innocence of children by monitoring their own behaviour. But when abuse occurs, an adult has sexually objectified a child and betrayed a primary trust (Gelinas, 1983). In the words of one incest survivor:

His violence will be with me as long as I live. Inside my womanhood, I am a confused and angry child. His ruthless rampage against my spirit left me unable to trust, afraid of criticism or assistance, terrified of rejection and loss, unwilling to risk the tender touch of someone's words or hand. (Quoted in Lindberg & Distad, 1985, p.331).

In the past fifteen years there has been growing public awareness of the alarming numbers of children who are sexually abused by those entrusted with their safety and well-being. Recent estimates indicate that one in four girls and one in seven boys are likely to be sexually abused in their families before they are eighteen (Davis, 1991). Only too often the adults involved are fathers or mothers, grandparents, uncles or aunts, older siblings, or cousins. These are the very people a child should be able to count on for loving care and protection from harm. Several mainstream researchers have documented the connection between the degree of prior closeness and trust in the relationship with the abuser and the extent of the psychological trauma reported by adult survivors (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Herman, et al, 1986; Russell, 1986; Tsai, Feldman-Summers & Edgar, 1979).

It is hardly surprising that children violated in this way should grow up to report that they experience great difficulty in establishing and maintaining close intimate relationships (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1989; Herman, 1981). As adults, they may both fear and mistrust intimacy while at the same time they long to feel safe and loved. Van der Kolk (1984) describes this vacillation and ambivalence when he states:

Their relationships are characterized by alternating periods of intense searching for closeness ... and angry or despairing withdrawal ... (p.115).

Intrafamilial child sexual abuse, or incest, has been

broadly defined as any kind of explicit and exploitative sexual contact between an older relative (at least five years older) and a child under eighteen years of age (Russell, 1983). Since the 1970's, there have been numerous prevalence studies of child sexual abuse. When methodologically sound studies of random samples of the population are used, the prevalence rates vary between 16% in a San Francisco sample of 930 women (Russell, 1983), 21% in a Los Angeles sample of 248 women (Wyatt, 1985), and 32 % in a South Carolina sample of 391 (Murphy, Kilpatrick, Amick-McMullen & Veronen, 1988). These figures were derived from lengthy face to face interviews conducted by interviewers trained to provide a safe atmosphere wherein women might be more likely to reveal old secrets. The most thorough Canadian study, so far, is one which involved a random probability sample of 2,135 men and women drawn from the national population, 94% of whom completed a questionnaire delivered and collected by a researcher. Before the age of 15, 24% of these men and women reported being subjected to an unwanted sexual experience by an older adult-- a close relative, or someone with power and authority over them (Bagley, 1984). The likelihood is great that the victims of child sexual abuse will present at some time in their lives for psychotherapeutic help and, indeed, a very high percentage of psychiatric patients have been found to have a history of child sexual abuse (Peters, 1988). Peters found the likelihood of suicide attempts to be three times higher among women who were sexual abuse survivors than those who had not been

sexually abused and this finding was replicated in a recent New Zealand community study (Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans & Herbison, 1996).

A review of the mainstream psychological literature indicates that the most frequently noted symptoms reported by adult women who were sexually abused as children include depression, anxiety, fear, suicidal and self-destructive behaviours, feelings of powerlessness, stigma and isolation, low self-esteem, sexual disturbance and dysfunction, and lack of trust in others. Also reported are tendencies toward being re-abused, the deliberate numbing of feelings by substance abuse, and problems with intimate relationships (Finkelhor, 1990; Herman et al, 1986). Mainstream researchers generally recognize that it is difficult to causally link these symptoms to either the childhood sexual abuse experience alone, to previous and ongoing family dysfunction, or to the subsequent lack of appropriate response from others (Beitchman, Zucker, daCosta, Akman & Cassavia, 1992; Ussher & Dewberry, 1995). However, the data from empirical studies suggests a correlation between a history of child sexual abuse and some or all of these symptoms (Murphy et al, 1988). In addition, most researchers hypothesize that any of these symptoms would be likely to have an adverse effect upon the primary relationships of survivors (Herman et al, 1986).

Intimacy difficulties frequently do not become apparent for survivors until they are established in a formalised committed relationship (Maltz, 1988). Douvan (1977) has written that

relationship (Maltz, 1988). Douvan (1977) has written that intimacy requires the capacity and willingness to be dependent and the "ability to bear, accept, absorb, and resolve interpersonal conflict and hostility" (p.26). Dinsmore (1991) notes that intimacy implies "honesty, vulnerability, trust, respect, connectedness, and openness" (p.101). It is no wonder, concludes Dinsmore, that being intimate is particularly difficult for someone whose childhood relationship experiences were based on "dishonesty, deceit, exploitation and betrayal" (p. 101).

Sgroi (1988) has noted two distinct patterns of presentation for female survivors of child sexual abuse. One group of survivors, often those who are highly symptomatic, seek help from clinicians in their late adolescence or early adulthood. The other group of women present from their late twenties onwards and frequently appear to have been functioning competently and successfully in the world although they may have sought help for depression, anxiety, physical problems or sexual dysfunction in the past. Something catapults them into acute symptomatology which is connected to their earlier history of sexual abuse, for example, a cooling in the marital relationship, the birth of a child, or a daughter reaching the age at which her mother was abused. Often it is the experience of being with an intimate partner whom the survivor feels she may be able to trust and feel safe with. This, in itself, seems to bring to the fore memories of the betrayal of trust in childhood. Certain repercussions of the incest appear to remain dormant until this time. It is also

possible that once the survivor begins to perceive herself in the role of wife, she is likely to begin to feel that she ought to be sexual with her husband. The notion of sex being obligatory rather than mutually pleasurable is one which is a likely carryover from the childhood experience of having to comply with the sexual demands of a person who has only self-interest in mind (Maltz, 1988).

Recently, some writers have begun to consider the experience of those who are the intimate partners of adult sexual abuse survivors (Burggraff, 1993; Davis, 1991). Clinicians have observed a process of what looks like vicarious victimization suffered by the partners of survivors (Maltz, 1988). Maltz discusses the unique set of emotional concerns described by partners and concludes that essentially these have to do with feelings of profound rejection. Partners she has worked with often feel sad or resentful about the loss of physical closeness; they feel guilty because of their own healthy sexual needs; they feel pain at being the ones to trigger incest memories and associations. Partners are often seen to become anxious and depressed. Sometimes, they blame the survivor or try to get him or her to forget the past and move on.

Mainstream psychological researchers have speculated about the possible ways in which a history of childhood sexual abuse may have an adverse effect on adult intimate relationships (Courtois, 1979; Sanderson 1990). Paiser (1991) points out that the literature addresses two primary areas of the survivor's

relational world. The first has to do with ambivalence about trust and intimacy and the second with sexual problems, some of which have their origins in the confusion of sex and intimacy. Mainstream studies, while interesting, tend to fragment experience into symptom categories - a process which overlooks the rich structural actuality of lived experience. In addition, empirical studies which focus on the symptomatology of the individual do not explore the quality of the interrelational experience of the couple. These studies are impoverished by the absence of descriptions making explicit both the subjective and the intersubjective meanings of partners living within the relational experience.

A thorough review of the literature in search of studies on couples relationships where one partner is a survivor of child sexual abuse, revealed a few clinical reports (Barnett, 1993; Gordy, 1983; McCollum, 1993; Taylor, 1984). To date there has been one empirical study which looked at couples' relationship satisfaction and behaviours demonstrated during an interaction task (Waltz, 1993). There has also been one qualitative study of couples' retrospective perceptions of therapy effectiveness (Reid, 1993). However, there have been no rigorous research efforts which specifically address the lived experience of both the partners engaged in co-constituting an intimate relationship when one of them has suffered an extreme and specific violation of safety and trust in childhood.

an exploratory phenomenological investigation of the subjective and intersubjective experience of couples when the woman is a survivor of child sexual abuse. The phenomenological approach holds that human beings are given to us as both subject and object in the world. As human beings we do not dichotomously experience being at one moment a subject and at another an object. There is, furthermore, no separation between the lived experience and its meaning, for our experience is lived as meaning. Whereas a study grounded in mainstream psychology might have sought to explain or account for the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse upon intimate adult relationships, the intent of this existential-phenomenological study is to describe the experience of the relationship in terms of its meaning for both people living in it. The primary aim of this study is to grasp and articulate the structure of the interrelated meanings inherent in the phenomenon of living relationally with the aftermath of child sexual abuse.

The method of choice for researching this phenomenon is an empirical-phenomenological one (Giorgi, 1975, 1985). The phenomenological method systematised by Giorgi at Duquesne University is rigorous and highly disciplined and requires an analytical and reflective approach toward descriptions of lived experience. Through this method, the researcher's task is to articulate the structure of interrelated, lived meanings of both subjective and intersubjective experiences of specific phenomena in all their richness and complexity. The methodology section of



this thesis includes a rationale for using this empirical-phenomenological method, the characteristics and requirements of the method, and details of the precise ways in which the method is used in this study.

The review of the literature begins with a brief historical account of how there came to be a conspiracy of silence surrounding the victimization of children in their homes. It was only when this silence was ended in the 1970's that contemporary writing about child sexual abuse and the aftermath of this abuse began to mushroom, albeit in a somewhat haphazard and piecemeal fashion.

The subsequent literature review will examine and critique, from a phenomenological perspective, the foundational contributions of mainstream psychological theory and research. The initial focus will be on ideas and models which purport to explain how being sexually abused as a child can effect the ability to have trusting relationships and impair the potential for intimacy in adulthood. The literature review will continue with empirical findings, both quantitative and qualitative, which consider the impact of childhood sexual abuse upon adult intimate relationships. A final section will be devoted to existential-phenomenological contributions toward an understanding of what it means to be victimized, traumatized and abused.

The aim of this study is to extend beyond our present understanding of how intimate relationships are lived in the aftermath child sexual abuse. Through the phenomenological

aftermath child sexual abuse. Through the phenomenological method, the meanings of each partner's subjective and intersubjective experience of this phenomenon will be articulated. The study also hopes to reveal how self-other-world relationships may be transformed by the experience of living-in-relationship. Finally, the study will point toward clinical implications and directions for future phenomenological and mainstream psychological research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Contributions of Mainstream Psychology

#### Historical context for research on child sexual abuse

In ancient times, women and children were deemed to have no human rights and to be the property of their fathers or husbands. The Old Testament records that in some communities a daughter was responsible for her own virginity and if she was defiled, it was her fault (Brownmiller, 1975). De Mause (1974) has documented the ways in which children, since the middle ages, have been subjected to molestation, exploitation and intimidation by those who were supposed to be their caretakers. The taboo against using children as sexual objects dates back only a few hundred years and it was not until the sixteenth century that laws were passed protecting children from being sexually exploited (Schultz, 1980). However, the criminalization of sexual abuse against children may not have had the desired effect of limiting its occurrence, rather the effect may have been to intensify the taboo against reporting it (Justice & Justice, 1979).

Until this century, literary accounts of the mistreatment of children tended to idealize the impact of early abuse upon those who survived it. A characteristic Victorian myth, as exemplified in the novels of Charles Dickens, was that the more harshly children were treated, the more saintly and sterling their characters would become - both as children and as adults. However, running parallel to such literary writings were historical accounts of the way in which certain cataclysmic

events in the lives of both children and adults could live on as indelible recurring memories (van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1989). It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the psychological processes connecting traumatic early experiences to severe emotional distress in adulthood began to be studied systematically, first by Charcot and then by Janet and Freud.

Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1989) have recently reviewed Janet's fundamental contribution to our understanding of psychological trauma. Janet's close observation of women suffering from what was then called "hysteria", led him to realize that traumatic experiences are stored in memory in a radically different manner from the way in which mundane events are stored. Janet claimed that because frightening, emotionally-laden and unusual events are so alien to what is already known and understood about the self and the world, memories of these events may be split off from consciousness and form "subconscious fixed ideas". In other words, he maintained that these dissociated memories originate in a failure to make sense of the trauma. While Janet recognized that this might serve as an immediate protection from complete emotional breakdown, he also realized that it precluded the possibility that the memories could be integrated and made sense of.

Freud, who had worked with Janet in Paris, took back to Vienna with him what he had learned about the way in which intolerably intense feelings connected with a traumatic event could lead to the formation of what he and Breuer were to term a

"double consciousness" (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1955). Freud's early case studies revealed to him the apparent frequency with which his women patients with symptoms of hysteria had experienced sexual abuse and incest in childhood and, at first, he chose to believe the veracity of their reports. The Aetiology of Hysteria (Freud, 1896/1962) contains the statement:

I therefore put forward the thesis that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades. (p.203)

During the following year, Freud began to retreat from his thesis and from the awesome social consequences implied thereby. Masson (1984) has suggested that in order not to have to face the thought that young girls from apparently respectable families might not be safe from the "perverted acts" of their fathers, brothers and uncles, Freud had to stop believing what his women patients were telling him. In order to maintain his view of the world while not negating his analysis of the causes of hysteria, he made a critical adjustment. He concluded that in fact his patients had not been sexually violated but had merely fantasized scenes of seduction (Freud, 1925/1959). From this time on psychoanalysis was to focus on erotic wishes and fantasies carried forward from childhood. Judith Lewis Herman (1992) in her analysis of Freud's historical volte face concludes that the

"dominant psychological theory of the next century was founded on the denial of women's reality" (p. 14).

Silence once more blanketed the awful truth that children were being sexually abused in their homes. The Kinsey Report of the 1940's, which did much to demythologize other sexual behaviours such as masturbation, totally belittled the importance of child sexual molestation. The report claimed that if children were upset about being sexually approached by adults, it was because of the over-reactions of prudish adults and not because of what was done to them (Herman, 1981). It was not until the emergence of the Women's Movement in the 1970's that women found a safe forum in which to overcome their fear and shame and begin to speak, first about rape and then about incest.

Clinical researchers and academics were not the first to draw attention to the frightening prevalence of childhood sexual abuse. The first descriptions came from the victims themselves (Angelou, 1970; Armstrong, 1978; Butler, 1978) and from front-line social workers and counsellors in grass roots feminist organized rape crisis centers (Herman, 1981). Finkelhor (1984) has referred to this as the first populist movement in mental health. Partly as a result of this, the literature was originally focused on establishing the prevalence of child sexual abuse, listing the symptoms reported by survivors, outlining diagnostic criteria, and concentrating on therapeutic interventions that seemed to be effective. There was at first a noticeable lack of theory-based research. Today, there is still

no generally agreed upon theory which accounts for the aftermath and long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse although, since the 1980's, many prominent researchers seem to be gathering under the general rubric of trauma theory (Briere, 1989; Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1984; Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 1987).

The section of the literature review which follows presents a critical appraisal of a selection of mainstream theories and models devised and used by researchers to explain the complexities of the aftermath of child sexual abuse. For the purpose of this literature review, not all theories as they relate to the aftermath of child sexual abuse will be discussed. Behavioral/learning theories, the information processing theory of Mardi Horowitz (1986), and interactional models which combine different theories for pragmatic purposes (McCann & Pearlman, 1990), although interesting, are too far removed from the existential-phenomenological position to evoke a meaningful dialogue. Psychodynamic, attachment, family systems, feminist, social cognitive, and trauma theories lean more toward a human science mode of investigation and are therefore more congenial and amenable to dialogue. After each theory is reviewed, a critical appraisal from a phenomenological point of view will highlight the particular assumptions and biases which are intrinsic to that theory and moves toward the rationale for an existential-phenomenological study of the intimate relationships of couples where one of them is a child sexual abuse survivor.

Theoretical Perspectives Pertinent to Researching the Relational  
Worlds of Child Sexual Abuse Survivors

Psychodynamic theories

In attempting to explain the recurring nightmares of those who had experienced extreme fear as children, Freud (1939/1953) formulated the notion of repetition compulsion, postulating that the dreamer was attempting to "master" the terrifying experience by repeating it. He suggested that the compulsion to repeat occurs because, at the time of the event, the person protectively shut-off the intense emotion which was appropriate to the experience. Freud had earlier (1920/1953) described a defensive process of denial or inhibition by which the experience was thrust out of consciousness because of the "unbearable affect" aroused. Faced by external stimuli that might overwhelm the ego by breaking through "the protective shield" around the psyche, the individual blocks or represses the stimuli. Presently referred to as intrusion and constriction, these two alternating aspects of the subjective experience of trauma, continue to be addressed in contemporary trauma theories.

Kardiner, in a clinical study of "shell shock" and "combat neurosis" during the First World War, focused on the nature of the traumatic event as being pathogenic in and of itself and discounted the significance of intrapsychic factors in bringing about combat neurosis (Brett, 1993). His theoretical formulations closely followed Janet's theory of hysteria, stressing, as they did, the adaptive aspect of combat neurosis



and the need to "unravel the sense behind the symptomatology" (Kardiner, 1959, p.247). In 1947, Kardiner revised his earlier work to incorporate new understandings from the experience of the Second World War. Firstly, he suggested that given enough combat trauma any soldier could break down and, secondly, that the best protection against combat neurosis was a strong relationship between the soldier and his comrades and leader (Kardiner & Spiegel, 1947).

Henry Krystal disagreed with the focus of Kardiner's theory. His psychoanalytic model of trauma was based upon the individual's subjective experience and derived from his study of survivors of the Holocaust. He believed that it is the meaning that the individual ascribes to the event that determines whether it is traumatic or not. Perhaps because the Nazi concentration camp experience epitomised a situation of extreme and chronic threat, as opposed to a single terrifying incident, Krystal's theory assumed psychological surrender to be the expected response to overwhelming fear (Brett, 1993). Krystal described how he struggled in vain to understand the distress he observed in Holocaust survivors in the light of previous theories of trauma. He concluded that psychic trauma could not be understood in terms of the intensity of the stimuli, as Kardiner had postulated, but rather in terms of "the psychic reality of the individual, and how that person interpreted and reacted to the experience" (Krystal 1984, p, 7). He was also struck by the differences between the reactions to trauma by children and

adults. He recognised that if children were at a stage of development where they could not name or differentiate intense feelings they might more easily be overwhelmed and reduced to helplessness, whereas adults might be better equipped to anticipate and defend themselves.

Contemporary psychodynamic writers like Leonard Shengold (1979) have viewed childhood abuse from an object relations perspective. Shengold departs from the Freudian tradition in stating that actual overwhelming experiences during childhood "have a different - and more profound - destructive and pathogenic effect" (p.533) than could any likely childhood fantasy. He refers to the extremes of chronic and repetitive abuse inflicted on some children as "soul murder", noting that:

Children can be broken much more easily than adults, and the effect on them of torture, hatred, seduction, and rape -or even of indifference, of deprivation of love and care - is the devastating one of developmental arrest; for their souls - their psychological structure and functioning - are still forming. (p.537).

Shengold addresses the fact that children are utterly dependent on their parents for their survival. When a parent abuses a child, this places the child in the impossible position of having to recognize that the parent is bad while at the same time often having no one else to turn to for love and comfort but that same parent. This desperate dilemma can result in a splitting or mind-fragmenting operation whereby the "bad has to

be registered as good" (p.539). To survive, the child must maintain the delusion that the parent is good and loving and it is the self which is bad and deserving of harsh treatment. Shengold refers to the isolation and compartmentalization of feeling that can follow as "a hypnotic living-deadness, a state of living 'as if' one was there" (p.538).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the nature of the intimate relationship between an incest survivor and her partner might be seen to be at least partially determined by the survivor's unconscious conflicts and projective identifications brought into the marriage from her childhood. It might be anticipated that the survivor would have a distorted perception of her spouse reflecting a transferential reaction to her abusive father. Psychoanalysts also use the term collusion to refer to the unconscious collaboration between partners. This is viewed as an active process by which one not only chooses a mate on the basis of one's own unfulfilled needs but also implicitly offers to meet the unfulfilled needs of the other. A psychoanalytical researcher might consider the relationship between an incest survivor and her partner to be collusive. For example, the survivor might be viewed as having chosen her partner to meet her own unfulfilled needs for submission while implicitly agreeing to meet her partner's unconscious and complementary need for domination and control.

The psychoanalytic perspective is generally considered to be intrapsychic rather than interactional in focus (Gurman, 1978).

For phenomenologists, this means that the fundamental relatedness of human beings to others and to their world tends to be overlooked (Mook, 1985). From a phenomenological viewpoint, psychoanalytic interpretations are often biased in their narrow focus upon the intrapsychic life of the individual as the object of study.

Spiegelberg (1972) notes that some existential-phenomenological thinkers, like Sartre, reject psychodynamic theory on the grounds that they find it mechanistic and speculative. In The Structure of Behaviour (1963), Merleau-Ponty discusses how phenomenology diverges from psychoanalysis and states categorically that phenomenology does not subscribe to the idea of causal explanations. He adds that phenomenology uses metaphors of structure and this represents a paradigm shift from the mechanistic metaphors of psychoanalysis. However, Merleau-Ponty also acknowledges the contribution of Freud. He recognizes that phenomenology and psychoanalysis share the essential idea that every human act has meaning. Merleau-Ponty (1962) observes: Freud himself, in his concrete analyses, abandons causal thought, when he demonstrates that symptoms always have several meanings, or, as he puts it, are "overdetermined". For this amounts to admitting that a symptom, at the time of its onset, always finds raisons d'être in the subject, so that no event in a life is, strictly speaking, externally determined. (p. 158).

In addition to the idea that every human act has meaning, both phenomenology and psychoanalysis rely upon understanding in order to bring to light the meanings of human actions (Hoeller, 1993). Hoeller draws attention to a passage from one of Merleau-Ponty's lectures in which he comments on the interpretative or hermeneutical aspect of psychoanalysis.

Freud's contribution is not to have revealed quite another reality beneath appearances, but that the plurality of possible interpretations is the discursive expression of a mixed life in which every choice always has several meanings, it being impossible to say which of them is the only true one. (Merleau-Ponty in Hoeller, 1993, p.7).

Clearly, there are some convergences between phenomenology and psychoanalysis but for the purposes of this study it is also important to keep in mind the differences. Psychoanalysis requires that theory be constantly evoked in order to interpret experience. However, existential-phenomenological methodology requires the researcher to rigorously "bracket" pre-conceived assumptions and deterministic presuppositions in order that the situated meanings of what individuals are experiencing in their self-other-world can emerge from their own descriptions of phenomena. Phenomenology, furthermore, is a descriptive science that seeks understanding rather than explanation or interpretation.

#### Attachment theory

John Bowlby, in his foundational work Attachment and Loss

(1969), declares categorically that emotional attachment is essential not only for infants to survive but also in order for the life of adults to have existential meaning. Bowlby contends that it is on the basis of early experiences with an attachment figure that the child constructs "internal working models". These are internal working models of the self as worthy of the loving attention of others, or not, and of others as trustworthy, accessible, caring and responsive, or not. The infant's internal representation of the attachment relationship plays a vital role in survival for it enables the infant to learn how to relate to the attachment figure in order to maintain essential proximity and reduce the chances of being abandoned.

Van der Kolk (1987) has defined the moment of child sexual abuse to be a violation of attachment affiliation. In his view, when a child is abused by an attachment figure, that child no longer has a safe base to retreat to when overwhelmed. Van der Kolk maintains that the rupture in attachment affiliation is experienced by the child both personally and relationally. The child has not only lost that sense of a comforting internal representation of the secure relationship between self and other but may also have lost the sense that he or she has a caregiver to turn to "who can be blindly trusted when (his or her) own resources are inadequate" (p. 32). For Herman (1992), abuse destroys attachments and this means "not only the isolation of the victim from others but also the destruction of her internal images of connection to others" (p.80). Jean Baker Miller

(1988) maintains that isolation such as this is the most terrifying and destructive feeling that anyone can experience. In her words, it amounts to "feeling locked out of the possibility of human connection" (p.7).

Bowlby stressed the vital biological function of attachment, but it is only recently that the neurobiology of attachment and the physiological effects of disruption and separation have been more fully investigated (van der Kolk, 1987). Recent studies of infants separated from their mothers have revealed lasting neurobiological changes associated with the protest and despair expressed by these infants. Van der Kolk speculates that abuse by caretakers in childhood may lead to a vulnerability toward hyperarousal states and an inability to self-soothe which may predispose survivors to have difficulty in modulating strong emotions when they are older.

The three original attachment patterns - secure, avoidant or resistant - demonstrated by children in Ainsworth's strange situation paradigm (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) were later found to misclassify a small group of insecurely attached children. This group of children were described by Main and Solomon (1986) as disorganized/disoriented because they had no consistent or coherent way of dealing with separation and reunion. It has been postulated that this pattern of disorganized/disoriented attachment emerges when a child is exposed to frightened and/or frightening responses from an attachment figure (Main & Hesse, 1990). In many cases, these

confusing and upsetting behaviours originate in the attachment figure's own history of unresolved trauma or abuse. However, Main and Hesse point out that for the child exposed to trauma, the attachment figure may be both the source of the child's fear and anxiety and, at the same time, the only one to turn to for solace.

Working models of attachment are assumed to function primarily out of awareness. A major question for contemporary attachment theorists studying attachment styles in adults, concerns the stability of working models over the lifespan and their resistance to change (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). There have, as yet been no long-term studies of attachment stability. However, Hazan and Hutt (1993) in a retrospective interview study, found that 22% of the adults they interviewed reported a shift in their adult attachment style (almost exclusively in the direction from insecure to secure attachment). In addition, this group of adults were significantly more likely to report having had a close relationship which disconfirmed their earlier relational experiences and expectations in comparison to adults reporting no change in attachment style. These findings hint at the possibility that adults who have been insecurely attached from childhood may succeed in transforming their working models of self and other through positive relational experiences.

Alexander (1992) maintains that incest survivors who have resolved many of their individual issues around the abuse may still retain internal working models of relationships which will



need to be addressed if they are to have more satisfactory interpersonal relationships and avoid re-victimization. She also suggests that the nature of the important relationships in the abused child's life may mediate the long-term effects of the abuse.

Briere (1992), writing about the trauma of child abuse (including sexual abuse) contends that because the original abuse occurs within a close relationship, adult survivors tend to manifest "disturbed relatedness". He suggests that the interpersonal difficulties of survivors "centre primarily on ambivalence and fear regarding interpersonal attachment and vulnerability" (p.50). One aspect of disturbed relatedness is what Briere has termed "intimacy disturbance". This refers to the survivor's ambivalence about emotional closeness, deriving from the fact that the abuse occurred within the context of a close relationship. Another aspect of disturbed relatedness is what Briere terms "adversariality", by which he means that survivors are likely to hold the belief that the world is "a battleground - where one endeavours to win (or lose) in order to survive" (p.54).

Johnson (1989) who writes from an attachment perspective advocates integrating individual and marital therapy with survivors. She maintains that:

Emotional reactivity and blocks arising from the past incestuous experience exhibit themselves most powerfully in present intimate interactions and in this context become

explicit and accessible to change. (p.97).

Current attachment theory is thought-provoking and has much to contribute to the study of the relationships of sexual abuse survivors and their partners. Unlike traditional psychoanalysis, attachment theory is based on the real-life experiences of children rather than their fantasies. Nevertheless, like psychoanalysis, it is still causal and deterministic in its presupposition that adult relationships can largely be explained in the light of the events of childhood. As such, it overlooks human potentialities for finding meaning in past experiences so as to transform self-other-relationships.

#### Social cognition theory

Recently, social cognition theorists have been hypothesizing that the relative impact of traumatization upon those who are victimized depends upon what basic assumptions victims hold about themselves and the world. Much of this theorizing is based upon the cognitive-experiential self-theory of Epstein (1985) which states that the essence of personality is "the implicit theory of self and world that the person constructs" (p. 283). Epstein and Erskine (1983) maintain that Freud's concept of repetition compulsion can be explained in terms of the human need to maintain a coherent conceptual system. They discuss, for example, the apparently self-destructive behaviour of an abuse survivor who persistently becomes involved with abusive men. If her world theory states that men are exploitative and dangerous and her self theory says that she is bad and undeserving of

loving care, then she may act in a way that enables her to validate these basic beliefs and maintain a stable, rigid conceptual system. She might then engage in the kind of behaviour which elicits harsh behaviour from a man who might otherwise have been ready to be considerate and caring toward her, proving to herself that what she dreads is in fact the case.

Operating from within Epstein's theoretical framework, Janoff-Bulman (1985) has formulated the theory that the acute distress experienced by trauma victims can be accounted for by the shattering of basic assumptions which victims hold about themselves and their world. Janoff-Bulman postulates that there are three interrelated, commonly held assumptions which are particularly affected. These are the belief in personal invulnerability, the perception of the world as meaningful and comprehensible, and the view of the self as positive. She states:

Victimization calls into question each of these primary postulates of our assumptive world, and by doing so destroys the stability with which we are ordinarily able to function (p.18).

The assumption of invulnerability is destroyed when one can no longer say "It will never happen to me". The experience of being victimized, once lived, is now accessible, so that it no longer seems so improbable that one could be victimized again. To some extent, our sense of invulnerability rests on the belief that there is a comprehensible order to the world so that if we are good and act sensibly, bad things will not happen to us. As

humans we have a tendency to act as if we believed in what Lerner (1980) has called the "just-world theory", that people get what they deserve. Victimization violates this belief and leaves the victim asking, "Why me?" The assumption that, on the whole, one is a worthwhile, acceptable person is lost when one is victimized. Suddenly one is different, stigmatized by calamity, weak, frightened and out of control. Janoff-Bulman (1985) discusses the task of victims faced by their shattered assumptions:

While victims are not likely to ever again view the world as wholly benevolent, or themselves as entirely invulnerable, they will still need to work on establishing a view of the world as not wholly malevolent and of themselves as not uniquely vulnerable to misfortune (p.22).

There are echoes here of Victor Frankl's (1963) belief that in order to survive horrendous events like the Holocaust, one has to find some meaning and purpose in the suffering. Lifton (1988), too, has spoken of the need to find meaning in a traumatic event so that "the rest of one's life need not be devoid of meaning and significance" (p.26).

Although the conceptualization of trauma as the shattering of assumptions is a very interesting one, there are problems with applying it to those who are sexually abused as young children. A young child, and especially one living in an unhealthy family situation, has a tenuous and idiosyncratic set of beliefs about self and others rather than a well-established set of assumptions

which can be shattered. Also, the betrayal of the child's trust by a parent frequently has a more gradual and insinuatingly deceptive quality to it than the word "shattering" implies. Finkelhor (1988) points out that sexually traumatized children have been deliberately fed distorted assumptions of self, other and sexuality.

Cognitive theorists like Janoff-Bulman maintain that the way in which people take in and process information determines how they feel, what they believe, and how they behave. For these theorists, all experience is reduced to cognitive processes. In this view, what is most important is not the lived experience but how it is interpreted and whether what is cognitively processed is distorted or not. As Hepburn (1993) points out, cognitive psychology, while emphasizing that people interpret and give meaning to their experiences "ignores the possibility that the meanings people construct for themselves also transform the existential status of the world" (p.59). A phenomenological study of the intimate relationships of incest survivors and their partners will address how child sexual abuse is lived experientially and how the self, the other and the relational world are always implicated and being transformed.

#### Family systems theory

In contrast with theories which concentrate on the intrapsychic life of the individual, family systems theory tends to subordinate intrapsychic issues in its search for patterns of interrelationships. Family systems theory represents a paradigm

shift from intrapsychic theories in that it derives from an epistemology of pattern. The basic principle upon which family systems theory is based states that systems behave coherently as inseparable wholes: The whole and its parts can be properly explained only in terms of the relations that exist between the parts.

From a family systems perspective, intimate relationships are subsystems of the family system and a researcher from this perspective would anticipate that the intimate relationship of an incest survivor and her partner would be characterised by inter-generational patterns carried forward from the survivor's family-of-origin. Several researchers have commented on the high probability that the parents of sexually abused children have themselves been emotionally, physically or sexually abused as children (Cooper & Cormier, 1982; Goodwin & DiVasto, 1979; Meiselman, 1979). A researcher operating, for example, from a Bowenian family systems perspective might anticipate that there would be problems in the intimate relationship because the survivor would be likely to have a "poorly differentiated" sense of self as a result of fusion or "emotional stuck-togetherness" (Bowen, 1978) in her family of origin. The survivor might also be expected to repeat patterns of relating to an intimate other learned in her family and to seek a mate who is similarly undifferentiated but who might manifest complementary behaviour styles (Morgan, 1987).

The way in which Bowen conceptualizes how people choose mates has much in common with psychodynamic theory, although Bowen expresses himself in different language. However, in its adherence to the structuralism of general systems theory, the family systems approach is radically different from the psychodynamic view of what goes on in intimate relationships. From a structural systemic perspective, an incest survivor and her partner might be viewed as trying to maintain homeostatic balance in the marital system by engaging in rigid patterns of repetitive behaviours and negative interactive cycles.

Family systems theory has been critiqued from a phenomenological point of view, primarily by Mook (1985, 1987b). She points out that family systems theory and phenomenology have in common a view of the world wherein all human beings live relationally and contextually. Heidegger described this as "being-in-the-world" and for Merleau-Ponty it is living as an "embodied-subjectivity-in-the world". The two approaches also have a common interest in the search for structure as the totality of the relationships of all the parts within the whole. However, there are significant philosophical differences between the two approaches. Mook (1985) points out that general systems theory, from which family systems theories were developed, is "basically a mechanistic science interested in physical and vital structures serving as basic explanatory principles" (p. 3). On the other hand, phenomenological psychology is a "descriptive science that seeks human structures embedded in the phenomenal

world of lived experience" (p.3).

Mook (1987b) bases her critique of the way in which systems theory conceptualizes structure upon the work of Merleau-Ponty. She points out that Merleau-Ponty distinguished between three different levels of structure which are irreducible to each other, i.e., the physical, vital and human orders. He describes physical structures as those which are closed and inorganic, whereas vital and human structures are organic and open in their dialectical relationship with each other and with their environment. However, only human beings, as distinguished from vital beings, have the capacity both to actively create their own structures and also to transform or move beyond them. In other words, human beings actively create and transform themselves in their dialectical relationship with the milieu within which they live. Simultaneously, they transform and are transformed by this milieu.

Drawing upon Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity, Mook (1989) conceptualizes the human family as "co-constituted as an intersubjective community" (p.252). For Mook, intersubjectivity is a basic postulate for understanding family systems. She stresses that phenomenologists regard the family as a system, but for them it is a human system and a system, therefore, of lived meanings and not one of formal extrinsic characteristics. Structural family systems theory maintains that it is the extrinsic, observable, formal pattern of interactions which is all-important. However, Mook (1985) points out that this view



overlooks intrinsic patterns of interrelated meanings and individual subjects are relegated to positions of comparative insignificance. Subsequently (1987b), she has pointed out the dangers inherent in an exclusive focus on the systemic paradigm for understanding the family. She states:

Systemic family therapists tend to overlook that the individual family members give meaning to their own and to each other's behaviours and experiences and are continuously creating their own personal and interpersonal structures (p.177).

The present study of intimate relationships where the woman is a survivor of child sexual abuse aims to articulate each partner's experience both of self and other within their relationship. The study also aims to reveal how self-other-world relationships are in turn transformed by the experience of living-in-relationship.

### Feminist theory

The feminist analysis of the aftermath of child sexual abuse is essentially political in nature. What unites feminists is their commitment to improve the situation of women. Despite their differences, feminists share the basic assumption that improving the situation of women means ending sexual exploitation and violence against women which, in turn, they consider originates in the historical power differences between men and women. Current feminist theorizing on child sexual abuse has developed from the early conceptualizations of rape (Burgess &

Holmstrom, 1975) and wife battering (Walker, 1979) and places child sexual abuse at the end of a continuum of violence against women. Herman (1992) maintains that feminists found it necessary to stress the coercive rather than the sexual aspects of rape and incest in order to counter the prevalent myth that rape and incest fulfill women's deepest desires.

In the 1970's, when it appeared that the vast majority of incest perpetrators were males and the overwhelming majority of victims were females (Gelinas, 1983), it became necessary to try to account for this gender difference (Herman, 1981). Feminists began to postulate that the only viable explanation for the systematization of men's intrusive, coercive and controlling behaviour toward women and children was the sociohistorical reality of male supremacy and female oppression. Feminists were satisfied that this was the only way to account for the centuries of silence surrounding the prevalence and destructive impact of incest. Only this could account for the fact that the silence was not breached until women found the mutual support in collectivity to speak about it and to withstand all attempts to discount what they had to say.

The feminist analysis of the 1970's was predicated upon the tradition of patriarchal family structure with its archaic notions that fathers had the right to do with their wives and children as they deemed fit. However, it was also the case that mothers in traditional families had more power than children, and so, for some feminists, the power differential was not enough to

account for why mothers appeared not to be incestuously abusing their children. Psychoanalytic feminists like Nancy Chodorow (1978) postulated that this could be accounted for by differences in the socialization of girls and boys which in turn were seen as outcomes of the sexual division of labour.

The appeal of the feminist analysis comes from the clarity with which it places the responsibility for sexual abuse firmly where it belongs - on the parental perpetrator. At the same time, it rigorously denies the myth of the seductive child and the collusive mother. Feminist theory is powerful and is much referred to in mainstream accounts of the causes and treatment of child sexual abuse. However, lately we have begun to find out more about the numbers of women who sexually molest their children and violate this most extreme of all taboos (Mitchell, 1987; Paiser, 1991). The idea of women sexually abusing their own children is appalling to those who wish to persist in the belief that almost all women are care-giving, nurturers and healers. Psychoanalytic feminists maintain that girls develop a relational sense of self through and in connection with their mothers (Chodorow, 1978). This has raised many questions about what happens to the development of girls when they are sexually abused by their mothers (Paiser, 1991).

Feminist thinkers have in common with phenomenologists a critical attitude toward the methodology of the natural sciences, which in Western intellectual life tends to be widely perceived as the only legitimate methodology for explaining and

interpreting the world (Benston, 1989). Feminists, like phenomenologists, question the epistemology underlying the natural sciences and especially the basic assumption that science is, or can be, objective and value free. Even if scientific objectivity were possible, it would still be unacceptable to feminist thinkers because, writes Benston (1989), "it is this assumption of isolated rationality that leads to the systematic treatment of other human beings as objects and, indeed, that allows scientists to take no responsibility for the uses of science in any area" (p.70). Whereas existential-phenomenological writers and feminist researchers espouse similarly critical attitudes toward the basic assumptions of the natural sciences, phenomenologists do not equate the methodology of the natural sciences with male domination and the so-called masculine values of autonomy, separation, distance, and control, as do many feminist writers (Keller, 1978).

A feminist researcher studying the relationship experience of an incest survivor and her partner would be likely to situate this relationship within the social context of a male-dominated society where the oppression of women within the home has historically been condoned. The researcher would be sensitized to explore issues of power within the current relationship, given the incest survivor's earlier experience of disempowerment and sexual exploitation at the hands of a man she should have been able to trust. Feminists are compelled by their political agenda to operate out of their ideological biases and they do this

openly. The existential-phenomenological approach, on the other hand, requires that all assumptions, presuppositions, theoretical and ideological biases be recognized, explored and acknowledged. Phenomenological methodology prescribes the disciplined way in which these preconceptions must then be "bracketed" in order that the phenomenon may be allowed an unbiased, receptive space within which to speak for itself.

### Trauma theories

Some writers (Herman, 1992) have indicated that there are profound similarities inherent in how human beings experience different kinds of trauma. These writers believe that it is through an understanding of the phenomenon of trauma as such that we will attain a clearer understanding of the unique inner experience and disruptions to optimal development suffered by those who have been traumatized in childhood. This is an interesting reversal of the more familiar Freudian notion that in order to understand adults, explanations have to be sought in their early childhood experiences (Lifton, 1988). Lifton offers us the broad perspective that each human being is in some ways "a perpetual survivor - first of birth itself and then of "holocausts" large and small, personal and collective, that define much of existence" (p.12). He contends that as survivors we are all "capable of growth and change, especially when able to transcend these 'holocausts' or their imprints" (p.12).

Trauma theories aim to understand characteristic human responses either to catastrophic natural disasters like fires,

earthquakes and airplane crashes or to atrocities designed by human beings for each other like rape, war, and hostage-taking. Herman (1992) has stated that the primary characteristic of a traumatic event is that the victim is "rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (p.33). She goes on to state that "traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary adaptations to life" (p.33).

It was not until the 1980's that people began to recognize that the distinctive pattern of symptoms and inner turmoil seen in many women who were survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as that seen in men who were survivors of war. In 1980, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became an accepted diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a diagnostic category derived from clinical findings and not theory-based. At this time, there is no one trauma theory as such. Trauma theories consist of some broadly agreed upon definitions of what makes an experience traumatic (Herman, 1992) and a variety of theoretical formulations, including conceptual models, which help explain trauma and its aftermath.

Essentially PTSD was defined as a response to the kind of traumatic event that would evoke symptoms of distress in almost anyone. Stress responses were categorized in three clusters which Herman (1992) characterizes and discusses under the general

headings of intrusion, constriction, and physiological hyperarousal.

Intrusion refers to the way in which the traumatic event insistently intrudes itself into the dreams or conscious recollections of the traumatised person. As Janet had theorized earlier, the traumatic event is encoded in memory in a horribly graphic visual form accompanied by intense sensations and emotions and these are re-experienced as if they were happening in the present.

Constriction, in Herman's classification, refers to that response to trauma where, powerless to act or escape, the only remaining response requires one to alter one's state of consciousness - replacing terror or pain with a state of detached calm. Detached states of consciousness or "dissociation" may recur, usually triggered by some reminder of the original event, and these are not under the control of the trauma victim. Although adaptive at the time of the trauma, because these dissociated states keep the experience walled off from consciousness, they also prevent integration and transformation of the experience. Constrictive symptoms extend beyond the impact on thought and memory. What may be experienced by the victim of trauma is a numbing of responsiveness or a reduced interest in the world, feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, and constricted affect.

Hyperarousal refers to the physiological state of constantly anticipating danger. When a person is faced with extreme fear,

the normal responses to danger are mobilised. But the essence of trauma is powerlessness - the impossibility of either fighting back or escaping. So the appropriate state of physiological arousal and alertness is derailed and may take on a life of its own, leaving the person in a state of permanent hyperarousal regardless of whether or not the situation warrants it (Herman, 1992). Symptoms, not present before the trauma, include hyperalertness and exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, feelings of guilt for having survived when others did not or for not having done something to prevent the trauma, memory disturbances, and difficulties in concentration.

Trauma theories have much to say to us about the psychological and physiological responses observed in many adults who have been sexually victimized as children. The diagnostic category of post-traumatic stress disorder (APA, 1980) has been used by clinicians and researchers as a non-stigmatizing way of conceptualizing the impact of sexual abuse and one which allies sexual abuse survivors with other trauma victims (Courtois, 1988; Donaldson & Gardner, 1985; Eth & Pynoos, 1986; Gelinas, 1983; Lindberg & Distad, 1985).

However, other writers have expressed their discomfort with the use of the PTSD diagnosis in the conceptualization of childhood sexual abuse (Briere & Runtz, 1988; Summit, 1983). The diagnostic criteria for PTSD were derived from survivors of circumscribed or sudden traumatic events such as rape, earthquakes, airplane crashes, or combat. Recently, Herman (1992)



has critiqued the diagnostic criteria of PTSD which she maintains are appropriate for victims of a defined traumatic event but do not capture what she calls "the protean symptomatic manifestations" (p.119) seen in victims of prolonged trauma and in survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Childhood sexual abuse can be sudden and terrifying but frequently it is so insidious and subtle that the child does not recognize the danger. Herman has proposed a diagnosis called "complex post-traumatic stress disorder" conceptualized as a spectrum of conditions and currently under consideration for inclusion in DSM-IV (APA). This new formulation stresses a history of prolonged totalitarian control, including the kind of totalitarian control experienced within the family by incestuously abused children.

Herman maintains that subjection to totalitarian control results in alterations in affect regulation, consciousness, self-perception, perception of the perpetrator, relations with others, and systems of meaning<sup>1</sup>. The diagnostic category dealing with alterations in relations with others is particularly relevant to this proposed study. This category includes possible feelings of isolation and withdrawal, disruption in intimate relationships, repeated search for a rescuer, persistent distrust, and repeated failures of self-protection.

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<sup>1</sup> The diagnostic category "systems of meaning" refers to the loss of a sustaining spiritual faith and to the sense of hopelessness and despair often experienced by sexual abuse survivors (Herman, 1992, p.121).

David Finkelhor (1988, 1990) has also been vocal in his critique of the PTSD conceptualization of childhood sexual abuse, a trauma that he feels may share some elements with PTSD but is qualitatively different. He finds the PTSD diagnosis limited partly because it is not theory-based, and maintains that it is altogether too narrow in its focus. It does not address either the sexual aspect of the trauma or the fact that the trauma is inflicted upon a child who is still developing, and it discounts those who do not have PTSD symptoms but suffer in other ways, for example, from chronic depression and sexual problems. Finkelhor (1988) maintains that the trauma in sexual abuse is more likely to come from what it means to be betrayed in a primary relationship and trapped in secrecy, than from an overwhelming act. Finkelhor and Browne (1985) have proposed a different model which they call the Traumagenic Dynamics Model of Child Sexual Abuse.

This model suggests that there are four traumagenic dynamics which account for the impact of child sexual abuse: traumatic sexualization, betrayal, stigmatization, and powerlessness. A traumagenic dynamic is defined as "an experience that alters a child's cognitive or emotional orientation to the world and causes trauma by distorting the child's self-concept, worldview, or affective capacities" (Finkelhor, 1988, p. 68). Each, but not necessarily all, of these dynamics may be present in different degrees in different abuse experiences and the model allows sexual abuse to be viewed as a process rather than an event.

Traumatic sexualization, the first dynamic, refers to the way in which being sexually abused can shape a child's sexuality in a way that is inappropriate developmentally and leads to misconceptions and distortions about sexuality. Traumatic sexualization is hypothesized to lead to sexual problems in adult survivors such as lack of sexual desire, compulsive sexual behaviour, "promiscuity", or sexual dysfunction.

The second dynamic, betrayal, involves the realization in children that someone upon whom they were utterly dependent has violated their trust and treated them without regard for their well-being. Sometimes children experience a greater sense of betrayal, not from the abuser but from the person - often the mother - who seems wilfully not to have believed or protected them. The betrayal aspect of the experience is hypothesized to lead to problems in trusting others as an adult as well as to feelings of loss, despair, and depression. On the other hand, a survivor might also react to the experience of betrayal by becoming angry and hostile.

Finkelhor's third dynamic, stigmatization, refers to the way in which the child internalises messages about the self that tell her she is evil, dirty, worthless, a whore, or shameful. These messages may come directly from the abuser, who is shifting blame and enforcing secrecy, or from the moral judgments construed from attitudes children sense all around them.

The fourth dynamic of powerlessness, or disempowerment, refers to the way in which the child's needs are overruled and

his or her bodily integrity is repeatedly invaded through deceit or force. Sometimes the child is also subjected to coercion and violence which are experienced as the threat of imminent annihilation. The experience of powerlessness is likely to produce anxiety and increased expectation of further abuse that may lead to depression, suicidality, increased risk for future victimization, and increased needs for control. Each of the four traumagenic dynamics of the abuse experience described in Finkelhor and Browne's model is likely to have significant implications for how the survivor approaches intimate relationships as an adult.

The effort to understand the trauma of child sexual abuse by devising theoretical models has only been underway since 1984 (Finkelhor, 1988). The models of Herman (1992) and Finkelhor and Browne (1985) are now being subjected to the empirical testing required by the natural science paradigm (Draucker, 1995). These models represent a different perspective in that they both attempt to address what is unique about the experience of child sexual abuse among other traumas.

Despite their differences, most of the approaches discussed above have in common a fundamental natural science perspective toward the investigation of psychological phenomena. As such, they fall prey to the nomothetic scientific traditions of mainstream psychology in their primary focus on group commonalities. The nomothetic approach, by definition, overlooks the complex experience of each being-in-relationship. Briere

(1992) although solidly situated in mainstream psychology, has recently called for a phenomenological research approach which would emphasize the individual nature of each survivor's experience as opposed making generalizations about survivors based on the reductionist fact that they were all abused as children.

Empirical Studies pertinent to researching the Relational Worlds  
of Child Sexual Abuse Survivors

To date no prospective study of identified child sexual abuse victims has been reported. Empirical studies have been retrospective in focus and have tended to be correlational in nature. In this section, those empirical studies which relate specifically to the various theoretical perspectives presented above will be discussed first. After this, studies which consider the long term effects of child sexual abuse and its possible impact upon the intimate relationships of adult survivors will be reviewed. Finally, the few studies which examine the relational experiences of sexual abuse survivors and their partners will be addressed.

Several recent studies have used questionnaires to measure "object relation dysfunction" among sexual abuse survivors. In Katz' (1988) study of 32 father-daughter incest survivors matched with 21 non-abused controls, the object relations of incest survivors were found to be more impaired. Emmer (1987) found similar results in her study of 51 couples in which half the women were survivors of father-daughter incest. Researchers

have also found that women survivors of female-perpetrated sexual abuse tend to have more impaired object relations than do survivors where the perpetrator was a male (Mitchell, 1987). Although the sample was small and the study has not been replicated, Emmer (1987) found that those survivors of father-daughter incest who were lesbians had less-impaired object relations than did those who were in heterosexual relationships.

These recent correlational studies suggest that the way in which sexual abuse impacts on the object relations of survivors can be viewed on a continuum in which the gender of the perpetrator and the sexual orientation of the survivor make a difference. In other words, as might be expected from psychodynamic theory, sexual abuse survivors have been found to be more impaired in their object relations than non-abused women (Katz, 1988); those abused by women are more impaired than those abused by men (Mitchell, 1987); and those women currently in intimate sexual relationships with men appear more impaired than those in lesbian relationships (Emmer, 1987).

These results are consistent with Chodorow's (1978) hypothesis that girls experience a sense of continuity with their mothers and that their sense of self develops within this relationship. Chodorow's thesis would predict more impaired object relations where girls are abused by their mothers or close female relatives. It might also predict that women sexually abused by their fathers would have more difficulty in intimate sexual relationships with men than they would with women.

Recent empirical studies of adult attachment patterns are highly relevant for our phenomenological investigation. Alexander (1993) found that a retrospective self-report measure of attachment style effectively predicted the extent to which adult sexual abuse survivors were experiencing difficulties in interpersonal relationships. In a recent clinical study of 52 adult incest survivors (Panucci, 1992), most of the women described interpersonal patterns which indicated insecure attachment (anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized/disoriented). Those who described themselves as secure were less distorted in their object relations than those endorsing the disoriented/disorganized category. Emmer (1987) in her study described above, found incest survivors to be more likely than controls to be insecurely attached, to experience interpersonal relationships as painful, and to have difficulty tolerating separation and loss.

Several researchers have sought to determine whether adult incest survivors were engaged in a search for meaning and, if so, to what extent this effected their long-term adjustment. Brooks (1987) studied 32 women sexually abused as children, 24 of whom were abused by father figures. She found 31 of them to be still searching for a reason, for meaning, or for a way to make sense of their experience. Despite the passage of time, half of these women still thought of their abuse daily or weekly and 26% expressed the feeling that only finding a loving, trusting primary relationship would help to lay their childhood abuse

experience to rest.

Silver, Boon and Stones' (1983) study involved 77 women who were survivors of father-daughter incest. In response to questionnaires mailed to them, 80% reported that they were still searching for some way to make sense of their experience. The more active their search, the more likely they were to report recurrent, intrusive, and disruptive ruminations about their incest experience and the more likely they were to be suffering from psychological distress, social impairment, and low self-esteem. Half of the women had been able to find some meaning for what they had suffered. These women found that having someone to confide in seemed to help, but not guarantee this outcome. Although, as a group, they were found to be more distressed than women in the general population, they were less distressed, better adjusted socially, and had higher self-esteem than those who had not been able to find any meaning for themselves.

In a recent empirical study, Janoff-Bulman (1989) administered her World Assumptions Scale to 338 undergraduates, 83 of whom were classified as "victims" because they had previously experienced an extremely negative event: death of a parent or sibling, incest, rape, a fire that destroyed their home, or a seriously disabling accident. Victims perceived themselves more negatively and viewed the world as more malevolent than did non-victims. Both male and female victims were significantly more depressed than non-victims, although the women victims were less depressed than the men. Janoff-Bulman



suggested that this difference might be explained by the fact that women victims were found to have a more benevolent view of others, which might have led them to seek support and comfort in relationships.

Draucker (1995) has recently attempted to test a causal model identifying relationships among specific trauma-inducing experiences, the accomplishment of certain cognitive coping tasks, and the long-term effects of child sexual abuse upon adults. Structural equation modelling was used to examine the data obtained from a group of 149 survivors of child sexual abuse. Although her causal model did not fit the data, Draucker found significant relationships between recalled feelings of powerlessness as a child and the later experience of re-victimization as an adult. Recollections of powerlessness and stigmatization were also indirectly related to feelings of guilt and social introversion in adults.

From the mainstream perspective, almost any of the symptoms, feelings and behaviours most commonly reported by adult women incest survivors could be hypothesized to adversely effect their close relationships. As Paiser (1991) has pointed out, the mainstream literature has tended to focus on two primary areas in which the relationships of survivors may suffer. Studies have tended to focus on how relationships suffer because of the survivor's ambivalence about intimacy, and because of the survivor's problems with sexuality. Paiser notes that these areas may overlap because problems with sexuality often reflect

how sex and intimacy are confused by the survivor.

In those empirical studies which discuss the prevalence of sexual problems amongst women who are sexual abuse survivors, between 55% and 94% of women report problems in the area of sexuality (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1989; Frawley, 1988; Gold, 1986; Jehu, 1989; Langmade, 1983; McCabe, 1989; Meiselman, 1979). Sexual problems were reported by 94% of the 51 incest survivors in Jehu's University of Manitoba study (1989). Even amongst women who described themselves as having made a satisfactory adjustment to the abuse experience, sexual difficulties tended to persist (Feinauer, 1989). Becker, Skinner, Abel, and Treacy (1982), in a study of 83 women who were sexual abuse survivors, ranked the percentages of different sexual problems reported and noted the predominance with which disruption occurred in the first or arousal stage of the sexual cycle. The problems reported by women in this study included fear of sex, general sexual dissatisfaction including lack of desire, feelings of aversion, difficulties in arousal or orgasm, vaginismus, and dyspareunia.

When sexual abuse survivors report feelings of revulsion and abhorrence toward sex, it may lead to other problems. Russell (1986) found these feelings to be correlated with an increase in sexual and physical abuse in the marital relationship. Although causal links were not made, Jehu (1989) found that amongst his sub-sample of 24 survivors who were in relationships, 33% had been physically abused by their partners. Similarly, in Briere's

(1984) study, 49% of sexual abuse survivors had been battered by their partners, compared to 18% in the group of women not sexually abused as children. Katz (1988) reported that the 32 survivors in her study more frequently indicated that they had been used and abused by their partners than did the 21 controls.

Some researchers have reported a tendency for sexual abuse survivors to be promiscuous (De Young, 1982; Herman, 1981; Meiselman, 1979; Tsai, Feldman-Summers & Edgar, 1979) and to engage in prostitution (Silbert & Pines, 1981). However, Fromuth (1986) in a sample of 486 university students, found that there was no difference in terms of levels of promiscuity between previously sexually abused and non-abused women. Nevertheless, sexually abused women were more likely to describe themselves as promiscuous. Fromuth postulated that this might be a reflection of their negative feelings about themselves as sexual beings.

Many women who were sexually abused as children have described feelings of isolation and alienation. All 40 of the incestuously abused women in Herman's (1981) study said they felt branded, stigmatised or marked in a way that cut them off from others. Jean Baker Miller (1988) refers to this as "condemned isolation" or the sense that one is incapable of fostering and maintaining human connection, and she postulates that it derives from deep feelings of shame. In other studies of clinical populations, the proportion of sexually abused women who report feelings of alienation and isolation has also been high - in Jehu's (1989) study, 62% of 51 women felt this way, and in

Briere's (1984) study, the prevalence was 64% compared to 49% of clinical controls. Courtois (1979) studied a community sample of 31 incest survivors in which 73% reported feelings of alienation and isolation.

In a recent qualitative study using grounded theory methodology, Morrow and Smith (1995) interviewed 11 survivors of child sexual abuse survivors about their adult lives. Analysis revealed two core categories of subjective phenomena experienced by these women: Being overwhelmed by feelings experienced as threatening or dangerous, and experiencing helplessness, powerlessness, and lack of control. Of the 11 survivors interviewed, most had experienced feelings of terror at times and all had experienced fear, pain, or rage.

In general, researchers have found that the close relationships of sexual abuse survivors are plagued by problems of trust (Briere, 1984; Lindberg & Distad, 1985; Van Buskirk & Cole, 1983). Those who have studied female survivors of male-perpetrated abuse have reported that these women have more difficulty trusting men than women. Jehu, Gazan and Klassen (1984) noted that 77% of the 51 incest survivors they questioned endorsed the statement, "No man can be trusted". In Donaldson and Gardner's (1985) clinical sample of 26 incest survivors, 83% indicated they had trouble trusting men compared to 43% who had trouble trusting women.

Feelings of anger and hostility are frequently reported by adult sexual abuse survivors. Jehu (1989) found that 54% of the

51 women questioned in the University of Manitoba study felt angry and hostile toward men, compared to 39% who felt this way toward women. However, Herman (1981) in her sample of 40 survivors of father-daughter incest, found only 8% expressed fear or hostility toward men while the majority tended to overvalue or idealise men. Rather than directing their anger toward their fathers, they directed it toward their mothers and themselves. This difference may be partially explained by the way in which responses were obtained by the two researchers. Herman's findings came out of in-depth interviews with women who were in psychotherapy and/or with therapists working with them, as opposed to Jehu's which were derived from questionnaires. De Young (1982) and Meiselman (1979) also found that survivors of father-daughter incest expressed more anger and resentment toward their mothers who did not rescue them, than toward their fathers who abused them. This finding is consistent with what is known about our idealised expectations for mothers: We expect mothers to intervene, fight for, and protect their children, and we do not expect them to look the other way when their children are being abused.

Many survivors are reported to have a fear of intimacy and to find it difficult to separate intimacy, love, and affection from sex, probably because of the distorted ways in which these were associated during their sexual abuse experience (Meiselman, 1979, Paiser, 1991). Jehu, Gazan and Klassen (1984) reported that 77% of their sample endorsed the statement that it is

"dangerous to get too close to anyone because they always, betray, exploit, or hurt you". Dinsmore (1991) has stated that survivors often "believe they are having problems with sex when in fact it is intimacy that is toxic for them" (p.91). This may suggest that incest survivors tend to become involved in intense but short-lived, emotionally hurtful, or destructive relationships (Sanderson, 1990). Katz (1988) studied 32 survivors of father-daughter incest matched with 21 controls, and found that survivors had terminated relationships more frequently than controls. Meiselman (1979) looked at the proportionate amount of time which all the women in her study had spent in marital relationships since they turned 18. After correcting for present age, she found that the 58 incest survivors had been married for 39% of the time since they were eighteen, whereas the 100 non-abused controls had been married for 55% of the time.

Some survivors avoid intimate sexual relationships with men altogether, in what may be an extreme reaction to the trauma of child sexual abuse. In Courtois' (1979) community sample, 40% of the 31 incest survivors had never married. This compares with Meiselman's (1979) finding that 39% of incest survivors in her sample never married. Saxe (1994), in a recent Canadian study of 80 women incest survivors who were in individual therapy, found 48% of them to be single and 38% to be divorced. Only 14% of her sample were currently in relationships. Other researchers have reported the tendency of incest survivors to attach themselves to unsuitable partners (Russell, 1986) who often resemble the abuser

(Tsai & Wagner, 1978; Van Buskirk & Cole, 1983).

Only three studies could be found which have specifically looked at the quality of the marital relationships of sexual abuse survivors from the perspective of both partners. Reid's (1993) study, examined the perceptions of the 17 survivors and their partners as to the impact of the child sexual abuse upon their marital relationship. The issues which were raised were grouped into six areas: (a) problems with sexual intimacy, (b) dysfunctional communication patterns, (c) transference of the survivor's anger toward her abuser onto the partner, (d) problems in demonstrating affection through touch and physical closeness, (e) the partner's difficulties in dealing with inconsistency in the survivor's patterns of behaviour, and (f) survivors' perceptions of their partners' negative reactions toward them.

Waltz (1993) examined general relationship satisfaction, more specific areas of relationship functioning, and behaviour (during a couples' interaction task) in a sample of 42 female child sexual abuse survivors and their partners. She compared this group with a group of 36 heterosexual couples with no history of child sexual abuse. Survivors and their partners reported lower overall relational satisfaction, higher levels of abuse-related sexual problems, and more difficulty with trust than controls. During the problem-solving task, in which couple interactions were videotaped and analyzed, survivors and partners displayed a pattern of interaction unusual amongst distressed couples. Their interactions were characterised by sadness and by

low levels of emotional expressiveness. Waltz hypothesized that the sadness noted, particularly when these couples talked about sexuality, suggests that couples were experiencing a sense of loss around this issue. It is noteworthy that these couples displayed little of the critical, sarcastic, defensive blaming or denying of responsibility, that would have been predicted from the level of relational distress these couples were manifesting (about one standard deviation below the mean on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Spanier, 1976).

McCollum (1993) used a qualitative multiple case study research approach in a clinical study of four couples with whom he was working in couples therapy. For each couple, he posed the same question to himself, i.e., "What is the effect of recovery from child sexual abuse upon the survivor's marriage?" Subsequently, he analyzed his own written descriptions for commonalities. McCollum concludes that healing from sexual abuse alters not only the survivor's individual identity "but also the foundation of marital relationships, demanding not just a reformulation of individual identity but of relational identity as well" (p. 35).

Several studies have reported on the clinical outcome of support groups for male partners of survivors (Brittain & Merriam, 1988; Chauncey, 1994, Cohen, 1988; Jehu, 1989). Many of these men perceived themselves to be helping the survivor to resolve her problems and did not view themselves as needing help with problems of their own.



One of the most important themes raised by the men in these groups was the feeling that they too had been victimized. One man reported, "In a sense, he struck two people. He struck the wife and he struck us, too" (Jehu, 1989, p.153). Anger and frustration were felt by most of the men. Their anger was primarily directed toward the perpetrator of the abuse, but many of these men also felt anger toward the survivor and anger about the loss of control over their own lives. The single most important theme expressed by the men in Chauncey's study was one of conflicting needs. They experienced difficulty balancing their own needs for affection, nurturance, or autonomy with their wish to be of help to the survivor. Some men reported that they no longer knew what their role was or where they fitted into the relationship. As one partner stated, "I don't know what to do any more, she has changed so much" (Jehu, 1989, p.154). Partners often reported feeling useless, helpless, depressed, inadequate, mistrusted, and somehow as if they were responsible for the pain their wives were experiencing. They also felt isolated, hurt, and helpless in their attempts to be close emotionally and physically with their wives or girlfriends (Chauncey, 1994). Some men reported feeling they could not be honest about their own feelings for fear of making things worse and being viewed as unsupportive.

Sexual problems often seemed to exacerbate the partners' self-doubts, as one man said, "When my partner finds it difficult to have sex because of what happened in the past, deep down

inside, I question whether or not she loves me" (Jehu, 1989, p.155). Chauncey (1994) felt that sexual problems were embedded in and symbolic of the larger issue of difficulties with closeness and intimacy. Often partners reported that it was difficult to be spontaneous or natural, using the metaphor "walking on eggshells" to describe their experience. One man said, "I never know what's going to set her off. I can be going along thinking I'm doing exactly what she wants, and then she blows. It's like I'm walking in a minefield" (Chauncey, 1994, p.672).

In Jehu's (1989) discussion of the themes raised by partners, no positive responses were noted--only discord, dissatisfaction and distress. Jehu comments that in some cases the partner was reported to be exploiting, subjugating, or physically abusing the survivor. In others, the partner seemed to be overly dependent upon the survivor. Brittain and Merriam (1988) reported on a sample of 31 men who attended groups at the urging of their survivor-partner or her therapist. These authors viewed most of the men as "troubled individuals who felt entitled to the exclusive attention and concern of their survivor-partners, and came to the group hoping to learn ways to make the survivors better meet their own needs" (p.100). In contrast, Cohen (1988) and Chauncey (1994) reported that many of the men in the groups they studied showed significant understanding, insight, and empathy for their partner's feelings, and accepted their partner's need to protect herself by withdrawing or

distancing. Both Cohen and Jehu noted the paucity of research which looks at how being in an intimate relationship can help or hinder the recovery of sexual abuse survivors.

Many of the married women survivors in Reid's (1993) study, reviewed above, expressed a need for marital and sexual therapy in addition to the individual and group therapy they were receiving. These women felt that increased and appropriate partner involvement in the recovery process was essential. Conversely, they reported that ill-informed partner involvement, total absence of partner involvement and support, or intrusive over-involvement by a partner were more likely to impede their progress and adversely affect marital relationships.

To date, studies which investigate how being in an intimate relationship can affect healing from sexual abuse have primarily examined the experience of women raped as adults. In Burgess and Holmstrom's (1979) landmark study of 92 women who had been raped, the length of time required for recovery was directly related to the quality of the women's intimate relationships. Of the 51 women who were in some kind of partnership relationship at the time of the rape, those who happened to be in stable intimate relationships were able to make a more rapid recovery.

Kilpatrick, Veronen, and Best (1985) assessed 125 rape victims three months after the rape and found that the women who were the least symptomatic were those who reported that they were in intimate loving relationships with men prior to the rape.

When a woman is raped, it can place a severe strain on even

a well-established intimate relationship. But a woman who was sexually abused as a child, by the father or father-figure she should have been able to trust, inevitably brings the lived aftermath of her betrayal into her adult relationships. It is, therefore, not possible to extrapolate from the relational experiences of rape victims to those of incest survivors.

It seems safe to hypothesize that without a safe, trusting, intimate relationship (although not necessarily a sexual one) it is very difficult for incest survivors to heal the breach within themselves--let alone the rupture between themselves and others. In an early study, Tsai, Feldman-Summers, and Edgar (1979) compared 30 adult survivors of child sexual abuse who were currently in therapy, with 30 survivors who had never sought therapy, and 30 controls. The women who had never been in therapy focused on two major factors which they felt contributed to their recovery. The first factor was the support they received from friends and family which enabled them to feel that they were not at fault and that they really were worthwhile human beings. The second factor was having a sympathetic and understanding man for a sexual partner which enabled them to stop feeling "hatred and disgust" for all men.

Recently, some mainstream researchers have expressed their concern about the overriding nomothetic trends in the empirical literature (McCann & Pearlin, 1990). These writers stress that although victims of trauma undoubtedly share a common bond, it is important not to overlook the fact that each survivor is an

unique human being who experiences the trauma of incest within the context of a personal system of meaning.

Phenomenologists contend that, in empirical studies which are based upon the natural science model, an artificial split is created between the subject and the event. As Hepburn (1993) has pointed out, "That the victim and the event are inextricably intertwined in a structural unity is lost to natural science research" (p.7). In the mainstream empirical paradigm, it is reasoned that the abuse, which happened in the past, has had certain effects upon the survivor, and these effects will cause problems in her adult relationships unless and until she can deal with her symptoms and thereby relegate them to the past where they originated. But the question which really needs to be addressed is: How are the survivor and her partner presently living the abuse? It is not enough to know, for example, that most survivors report feelings of isolation and alienation. Knowing this does not make explicit how the survivor lives this isolation and alienation in her every day existence and how her partner may live her isolation and alienation with her. A phenomenological investigation is called for to make explicit what it means for both partners to live together where the one is a survivor of child sexual abuse.

#### Existential-Phenomenological Contributions

At this time there are no published studies or doctoral

dissertations which have used an existential-phenomenological approach to research the subjective and intersubjective experiences of couples where the woman is a survivor of child sexual abuse. However, contributions from existential-phenomenological thinkers provide a rich context in which to situate such a study. Merleau-Ponty's profound writings on the nature of being an embodied-subject-in-the-world are foundational and of the utmost importance for this study. Lifton's (1988) conceptualization of the psychology of survivors of catastrophic trauma are of great interest. Carrere's (1989) articulation of the nature of pre-tragic innocence is critical to an understanding of the devastation which can be wreaked by sexual abuse. The ideas of the feminist phenomenological philosopher Iris Young (1980) on embodiment and how women live their bodies ambivalently are also significant to a study of intimate relationships. In addition, there are three relevant studies which have used the phenomenological method as systematized at Duquesne University. These studies have researched the experience of people who have been criminally victimized (Fischer & Wertz, 1979), women who have been raped (Cosgrove, 1987), and men who were sexually abused as children (Hepburn, 1993). The above-mentioned contributions enrich and amplify our understanding of the ways in which trauma is lived, and how surviving it transforms the self and relationships with others.

At the deepest and most foundational level, this study rests upon the existential-phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. No other

philosopher has addressed so fundamentally the reciprocal and inextricable nature of being an embodied-subject-in-the world, and the implication that intersubjectivity and interpersonal relations are essential to the condition of being human.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) in Phenomenology of Perception makes it clear that it is the lived body which has the unifying and synthesising function of defining the structure and meaning of all human lived experience. The relation of subject to world is defined by the intentional orientation of the body as a whole toward the other and the world. What is utterly essential here is that the body is not an object in-itself. Merleau-Ponty states:

In order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the 'in-itself' (p.139).

Merleau-Ponty's ontology is fundamentally opposed to traditional Western dualistic ontologies which, as he points out, inevitably lead us into skepticism and/or solipsism. He takes the radical position that it is through the body that we are in the world and through the body that we are present to ourselves and to others. In his final work, The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty (1968) gives us the concept of "flesh" which he describes as "the concrete emblem of a general manner of being" (p.147), and which through its characteristic of reversibility radically undercuts classical mind-body and subject-object dualisms.

The use of this concept of flesh in a philosophical treatise is riveting in itself. For Merleau-Ponty, it lies at the basis of intersubjectivity and means the presence of the self in the other and the presence of the other in the self. Subject-object dichotomy is precluded, he maintains, because there is an embodied commonality between the self and the other "in virtue of the primordial property that belongs to the flesh" (1968, p.142). Johnson (1990) in his introduction to Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty, interprets Merleau-Ponty's use of the word flesh to mean "the trace of the other, the inscription of the other, in the subject's own selfhood" (p.xxv). He discusses how Merleau-Ponty uses this concept of reversibility to reveal how the seer and the seen; the toucher and the touched; the self and the other, are one flesh. For Johnson, this notion of flesh is critical to Merleau-Ponty's ontology. He states, "Flesh as prototype of Being is the opening to self-other communion and solidarity, just as it is the opening to self-other divergence and alterity" (p. xxi).

The characteristic of reversibility can perhaps most easily be understood by contrasting Merleau-Ponty's position with that of Sartre. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre (1956) discriminates between "the body as being-for-itself", that is, the body as subject touching itself or others, and "the-body-for-others", that is, the body as object, as it is touched by others. These ontological dimensions of the body, Sartre contends, do not communicate. Moreover, "the-body-for-others" can be taken to be



either my body as it appears to the other, or the other's body as it appears to me; these are equivalents for Sartre. Dillon (1988) points out that this commits Sartre to the position where if I am an object for the other and he for me, the relations between our bodies can only be external and non-revealing of our subjectivity. And indeed, Sartre's belief is that others are alien and alienating and that love is impossible because it involves the attempt to possess the freedom of another.

Merleau-Ponty uses the example of one of his hands touching the other to illustrate his thesis of reversibility. Clearly the role of each hand is reversible and there is no disjunction between the touching and the being touched such as Sartre has maintained. However, neither is there an exact coincidence. In his earlier work Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues for an essential ambiguity, or what Dillon (1989) calls identity-encompassing-difference, in reversibility.

Merleau-Ponty states:

When I press my two hands against one another, it is not then a matter of two sensations that I would feel together, as one perceives two objects in juxtaposition, but that of an ambiguous organization in which the two hands can alternate in the function of "touching" and "touched." (p. 93).

Merleau-Ponty's (1968) thesis of reversibility is also central to his understanding of intersubjectivity in that my body being seen by another can reverse this role and take up the

Other's vantage. I am then de-centered and allowed to see myself as the other might. I do not coincide with the Other but as flesh we have a commonality which allows for reversibility. In other words, I cannot be the Other but our common flesh allows me to experience "like-me-but-not me". Dillon (1989) discusses this experience by saying:

The Other's world is my world because the two views are reversible. His viewpoint is a locus in the Visible that I can occupy: it is not closed off to me, although I cannot live his experience of it and alienation remains a grounded possibility" (p.91).

This mention of alienation returns us to Merleau-Ponty's vigorous denial of Sartre's thesis that others are alien and alienating. Merleau-Ponty (1962) asserts that in order for us to experience others as threatening; to feel alienated; to need to withdraw; we must first have known what it is to share a human interrelatedness and similarity. He says:

For the struggle ever to begin, and for each consciousness to be capable of suspecting the alien presences which it negates, all must necessarily have some common ground and be mindful of their peaceful co-existence in the world of childhood. (p.355)

Merleau-Ponty does not address issues of alienation and extreme objectification such as those experienced by a child who is sexually abused by a parental figure. Nevertheless, it is possible to build upon his ontology and develop the implications

of his understanding. For instance, he comments on how painful it is to be objectified merely by another's look. Referring to Sartre's phenomenology of the look, Merleau-Ponty (1962) states that "the objectification of each by the other's gaze is felt as unbearable (only) because it takes the place of possible communication" (p.361). Barral (1993) has written extensively on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the role of the body in interpersonal relations. In discussing human relationships that fail, she states, "To be so severed from others is to be severed from the ground of being itself because it is through others that we have access to the world, to being, and the community of humans" (p. 173). Clearly for Merleau-Ponty, any human project which has as its end the objectification of another's subjectivity is an aberration of the human order and one which rents the fabric of essential human interrelatedness.

Lifton is a psychiatrist and a psychohistorian who reveals his existential leanings in his interest in how human beings live with death and the threat of death. His work is distinguished from most other psychoanalytic writing by its strong emphasis on the moral dimension inherent in trauma and suffering. Lifton's psychology of the survivor has been distilled from his qualitative descriptive studies of the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the Vietnam War. His focus on the lived experience of trauma survivors and the descriptions of what they have suffered, makes his work most congenial to existential-phenomenological thinkers.

Lifton (1988) talks about the dialectical nature of survival. There is a choice to be made between remaining numb or recognising the achievement of survival and its potential for growth and insight. He discusses the guilt and self-condemnation which survivors feel and which he postulates is associated with "failed enactment". By this he means that at the moment of crisis, survivors may have an immediate image of what they might do to prevent the calamity from happening, but this action-image is aborted by the overwhelming force of what ensues.

In Lifton's theory of trauma, primacy is given to "the internal environment of the symbolizing mind and its capacity to envision human connection on a variety of levels" (1979, p.8). By symbolization, Lifton (1969) means the specifically human way in which we inwardly recreate or give inner form to everything we observe or feel and every event which impresses itself on us. He contends that we know ourselves to be continuous through this process of symbolizing our life experience. When overwhelming trauma leads to dissociation or "psychic numbing", the capacity to symbolize and integrate the experience is derailed so that a radical discontinuity takes place within the self. Lifton (1979) believes that this amounts to "the self's being severed from its own history, from its grounding in such psychic forms as compassion for others, communal involvement, and other ultimate values" (p.175).

Mainstream psychology for the most part declines to use the term "meaning" on the grounds that it cannot be defined

scientifically. Lifton (1988) takes issue with this stance, maintaining that unless we address survivors' search for meaning we will not understand their response to trauma. He observes that survivors struggle to find meaning in the immediate moment--dealing with whether to connect or disconnect, act or go numb, integrate or disintegrate. Survivors also struggle to reinstate a more ultimate sense of human connectedness, in the process of which they question whether human beings are good or bad, and whether anyone can ever be trusted again. This struggle he calls the task of reformulation, which is the ultimate undertaking of the survivor. Reformulation requires that one evolve "new inner forms that include the traumatic event, which in turn requires that one find meaning or significance in it so that the rest of one's life need not be devoid of meaning or significance" (p.26).

One other manifestation of the traumatized self as observed by Lifton (1988) needs to be mentioned here because it directly relates to the interpersonal realm which is central to the present study. He has noted that survivors appear to feel both weak and in special need of nurturance but, at the same time, that they often resent help because it reminds them of their vulnerability. This is what he refers to as "suspicion of the counterfeit" (p. 25). For the survivor, promises of help or protection are deeply distrusted and felt to be false because "the human web has been all too readily shattered" (p.25) and human relationships can no longer be counted upon. Compounding this is the psychic stigma of the traumatized: "If one is treated

so cruelly, one tends to internalize that sense of being worthless" (p.25). Lifton's understanding of the phenomenon of catastrophic trauma, although only briefly touched upon here, cannot but contribute significantly to an effort to understand how the trauma of child sexual abuse is later lived relationally.

Carrere's (1989) poignant articulation of the structure of tragedy is drawn from descriptions of sudden and radical ruptures to the continuity of psychological life such as the death or near death of a loved one, the discovery that one was adopted as an infant, or facing unemployment. His findings (1986) have much in common with those of Lifton but are particularly important for this study because they are derived from the use of a rigorous phenomenological methodology.

Carrere (1989) describes the interrelated meaning constituents of tragedy as being facets of a psychological process and in no way to be conceived of as stages to be gone through. Carrere is also clear that tragedy is not to be regarded as an event which happens to a person. The possibility for tragedy in anyone's life is always there. However, this is hidden from us in the sense that we do not anticipate tragedy as we live our everyday taken-for-granted involvement with others. Carrere writes of the pre-tragic order:

It is an innocently lived engagement, a participation so effectively lived that it is not properly reflected upon. In fact, other possibilities of existence cannot properly be imagined, nor do they seem reasonable according to the

common order of things (p.110).

It is not that this pre-tragic world is lived without restrictions and limitations but rather that, on the whole, what limits there are to personal agency have acquired their own meaning and have been woven into an acceptable fabric of possibilities.

In the tragic order, as described by Carrere, the ordinary world in which a person has lived is torn apart. Tragedy is sudden and unexpected--an anomaly. It makes demands on the person for which he or she is not emotionally or experientially prepared. The coherence and continuity of the pre-tragic relational world are so radically disrupted that this world now appears incongruous. In this sudden and "tragic homelessness", the person is displaced and lives outside as inadequate, unimportant and useless.

A new structure of living has to be created, says Carrere, and ironically tragedy demands this from an individual who at the time feels "isolated, homeless and no longer nested in a web of relations" (1989, p.120). Initially it is through a process of reflection and self-education that the individual sets about re-envisaging how life must now be lived, and starts to create a new coherence and a new meaning. Carrere contends that there is no recovery from tragedy but rather a return to the social world and to a sense of belonging once again.

Child sexual abuse is often an insidious and surreptitious betrayal which the child does not recognize as tragic. Some

survivors are able to recall, what Carrere (1989) has termed, a time of "pre-tragic innocence". The sexually abused men in Hepburn's (1993) study, for instance, described their early childhoods within essentially familiar and predictable family structures. But for many survivors this is not the case. Some survivors have only fleeting and tenuous memories of their childhoods. Others have no memories at all, and it is these survivors who, from Lifton's (1979) perspective, might be described as having their selves severed from their own histories.

Carrere's analysis of the structure of tragedy is particularly relevant for the aspect of this study which looks at the experience of partners of sexual abuse survivors. It is not unusual for those who are in intimate relationships with sexual abuse survivors to report a sudden shattering of their familiar domestic worlds. Typically, this happens when the survivor's previously kept-out-of-awareness abuse experience intrusively resurfaces, demanding to be relived and attended to (Cohen, 1988; Davis, 1991). As one partner wrote:

From that day on, everything changed. It was like a hurricane going on around me. Sarah got obsessed with thoughts about the incest. I lost her as a wife and a mother. All her waking and sleeping hours were taken up with this issue. (Davis, 1991, p. 266).

Iris Young (1980) is a feminist and a phenomenologist who has raised issues about how women live their embodiment. She



maintains that the way in which women comport themselves bodily is a reflection of their existence in a patriarchal society. Young accepts Merleau-Ponty's account of the relation of the lived body to its world; an ontology in which each human being is an embodied-subject-in-the world. However, she tries to build on this by considering de Beauvoir's (1974) theories about the particular situation of women. Young makes the point that in sexist societies, women have frequently been objectified and regarded as mere bodies and so, for a woman, her body is often lived as a thing in-itself; merely one thing amongst all the other things in the world. Young writes:

An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention. (p. 154)

Although it is important not to discount the fact that only too many boys are at risk for sexual abuse, it seems likely that girls and women live the threat of invasion of their bodily space and integrity in a way that is different from boys and men. Girls and women are condemned to be responsible for what is or is not welcome to enter their bodies. Young has pointed out that the particular socio-historical context in which many women find themselves may limit the extent to which they are able to live their bodies unambiguously as pure presence to the world and

openness to all its possibilities. She writes:

As human, she is a transcendence and subjectivity, and cannot live herself as a mere bodily object. Thus, to the degree that she does live herself as a mere body, she cannot be in unity with herself, but must take a distance from and exist in discontinuity with her body. (p.154).

In other words, when women experience themselves as being objectified by another, they have the sense that they are living their bodies ambivalently as either subject or object, mine or the other's. When child sexual abuse occurs, the child's body is objectified and used for another's ends. Sometimes what the child does in order to prevent immediate psychological disintegration, is to abandon her body to the abuser. In a sense she disembodies herself and objectifies her own body.

A recent paper by Leslie Young (1992) addresses the problem of embodiment as it relates to sexual abuse. She notes that "the experience of trauma calls into question our relation to 'having a body' or 'living in a body' and makes profoundly troubling the centrality of the body in human existence and the body's claims upon us" (p. 91). In order to elaborate upon the distinction between "having a body" and "living in a body", Young discusses the way in which some sexually abused children temporarily stop being in their bodies although they continue to be aware that there is a body out there which is their's. Many sexual abuse survivors have described how they were able to temporarily remove themselves from their bodies during the abuse and watch from

somewhere else in the room. Others have described a more ongoing mind-body split in scrupulous detail and Young provides examples taken from Bass and Davis (1988):

If someone said, "What do you feel in your arm?" I would have had no idea what they were even talking about. If I touched it, I felt my arm with my hand. But I couldn't get inside it. I could only touch the skin from the outside. I couldn't have felt my heart beating. I couldn't experience anything from inside my body because I wasn't inside my body. (p.207)

I do feel a good part of the time that I'm not present in my body. It's as if inside, from my neck down, it's hollow, and there's this ladder, and depending on how things are going, I'm climbing up the ladder, and this little person that is me is sitting in my head, looking out through my eyes. (p.210).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) has claimed that it is through our embodied subjectivity that we are in the world. What does this mean, therefore, for women who have had to disembodiment themselves in order to survive? Leslie Young (1992) raises the question of whether it is possible to "achieve and maintain 'personhood' without full access to one's body; without the felt experience that 'this is my body', meaning both that it belongs to me and, given my total dependence on it, that I cannot be me without it" (p.9). The present research project aims to explicate the

structures of ambivalent embodiment, particularly as lived within an intimate sexual relationship.

Three studies, by Fischer and Wertz (1979), Cosgrove (1987) and Hepburn (1993), have used the phenomenological method as systematized at Duquesne University and these studies are relevant for this proposed research project. In 1979, Fisher and Wertz completed an investigation of the phenomenon of being criminally victimized. They analyzed the descriptions of 50 people who had been victimized within the past three years. However, they did not include victims of rape or incestuous sexual abuse and this means that, for our purposes, their findings will have limited meaning. The experience of sexual violation is inevitably embodied and lived in a way which is quite different from the way in which non-sexual victimization is lived. Nevertheless, all experiences of victimization will have essential commonalities.

One of the central themes emerging from Fischer and Wertz' (1979) study is that for those who are criminally victimized, the relative safety and predictability of their taken for granted world is turned upside down. The victimized person is suddenly forced to live being the prey of someone who is a predator. There is an immediate sense of vulnerability and isolation in that moment when it is clear that victimization is inevitable and unavoidable. The findings from this study further reveal that after the initial feeling of shock and disbelief, the full realization that one has been victimized becomes figural. This

is accompanied by feelings of anger, personal protest, outrage at the unfairness of what happened, and a wish for revenge. In the aftermath of victimization, Fischer and Wertz (1979) describe how victims struggle to regain a sense of control and agency. Often this takes the form of hypervigilance, alterations to formerly habitual ways of going about in the world, and elaborate efforts to ensure safety. Victims also worry about whether they contributed to their victimization in some way and what they could have done to prevent it. Wertz (1983), in a later publication, maintains that the struggle to understand how and why the victimization occurred is motivated "by the person's desire to re-establish himself as a subject (and thus surpass his being mere object/prey for the other)" (p. 198).

Fischer and Wertz (1979) conclude that most people manage to recover from their criminal victimization in the sense that the experience recedes to the horizon of their awareness. Those who are able to overcome their victimization do so by their own active efforts, by finding again a predictable safety in the environment, and through the empathic and active helpfulness of others. In time, most of the subjects in this study were essentially able to recover the natural attitude that they would not be victimized. Fischer and Wertz discuss this recovery as follows:

As the violation recedes, the person goes on, only upon reflection being aware of the transformation in his/her life. He/she then thinks of the transformation in terms of

constricted freedom and of a less trusting but wiser outlook. (p.147).

Lisa Cosgrove's (1987) explored the aftermath of sexual assault in an existential-phenomenological study of three women who had been raped. Her findings suggest that the aftermath of the experience was not resolved within the subsequent two years, and that the women did not anticipate future resolution. In contrast to Fischer and Wertz' findings, her study reveals that women who have been sexually assaulted do not recover the ability to live "as if" they will not be victimized again. They continue to live an ongoing vulnerability that they experience as intrinsic to being female and they do not surpass their victimization in the manner described by Fischer and Wertz. Cosgrove describes the essential quality of the aftermath of sexual assault as:

... the tension between wanting to live as a person whose subjectivity surpasses the fleeting everyday experiences of being objectified, while at the same time realizing that her objectification is possible at any moment. (p. 96)

Cosgrove maintains that for sexually assaulted women, the world will never be the same again. There has been a radical alteration in self-other-world relationships in that their world is now perceived as full of lurking dangers, others cannot be assumed to be benign, and the self is lived as the object of the exploitative intent of others. One of the women in Cosgrove's study describes this ongoing vulnerability as follows:

Being assaulted has changed nearly every aspect of my life ... The useful delusion of 'it can never happen to me' is gone for me. Now I feel that [I could be] assaulted again. And that has added to my daily worries ... I miss that trusting niceness about myself but unfortunately I think this fearful attitude is probably a safer one to face the world with. (p.97)

Davidson (1990), in a recent theoretical discussion of the two studies discussed above, maintains that Cosgrove's findings are phenomenologically more compelling than those of Fischer and Wertz. He questions Fischer and Wertz' suggestion that victims can return to a pre-trauma lifestyle. From a phenomenological viewpoint, Davidson finds validity in Cosgrove's conclusion that there has been a qualitative shift in how survivors live their self-other-world relations and that at best women learn to live with having been raped. A transformation has taken place in that they are now "thematically aware of the need to be fearfully present to the world" (Cosgrove, 1987, p.145). For Davidson, this has clinical implications, in that sexual abuse survivors should not be encouraged to deal with the abuse as an event which needs to be put behind them.

A central theme emerges from the phenomenological studies of catastrophic trauma, tragedy, criminal victimization, and rape, which have been discussed above. Consistent to all these studies is the notion that being traumatized involves a sudden and shocking disruption of taken for granted self-other-world

relationships. However, it must be remembered that the subjects in all these studies were victimized as adults. Young children who are sexually abused are still developing. In many cases, abuse is their lived reality. Moreover, there is often no force or violence involved; the abuse may have slipped into their lives in subtle and secret ways, exploiting and ravaging their innocence. Hepburn (1993) has researched the experience of men who were sexually molested as children in an attempt to build upon previous phenomenological studies, and clarify how childhood victimization is manifested in the lived experience of male sexual abuse survivors.

The central theme of the male survivors studied was consistent with those found in other studies of victimization. As boys who were molested, they had suffered a radical transformation in their taken for granted attunement to themselves, their friends and families, and the world. Before they were sexually abused, they lived as carefree, unselfconscious, curious children, eager to explore and express themselves. Hepburn contends:

It was this innocence, this openness to others and the willingness to explore new possibilities that provided the horizon for their sexual victimization. (p.174)

After their trusting innocence had been taken advantage of; after they had been abused by older men they loved and trusted; they no longer moved toward the new with spontaneity and enthusiasm, but instead isolated themselves in shame and doubt.



They felt shame at having experienced physical pleasure in a sexual act that was clandestine and taboo. They felt self-doubt and guilt about allowing themselves to be subjugated and taken advantage of, and that they had not fought off the perpetrator. As Hepburn writes, "they now lived their lives defensively and constricted their possibilities by working to organize and control their worlds" (p.184).

Having had their trust violated, these boys concluded that they must mute and contain their emotional expressiveness in order to protect themselves from further victimization. Later, in their interpersonal relationships as adults, they were guarded, self-protective, and rational, hiding their feelings of vulnerability, hurt, and weakness. Hepburn discusses the possibility that, for these men, having to keep the secret of being abused becomes a metaphor for disguising their violated and vulnerable selves. He writes, "The secrecy which surrounded the abuse established a paradigm for hiding the feelings and intentions of these subjects from others" (p.191). One male survivor described how he "tried to cover up the child sexual abuse, masking that and then creating a person on top of it that wasn't very nice, wasn't very trusting and wasn't very whole" (p.192).

As adults, these men who had been molested as children all experienced conflict in the area of sexuality. Of the five men, two were homosexual and of the three who were heterosexual only one was married. One subject avoided sexual relationships

altogether; another engaged in an endless quest for sexual partners, in "an effort to burn off the bad feelings" (p.189). All of these men reported how telling their secret to someone they could trust began the work of healing for them. Before this they had lived as though they had two separate selves; the public untouchable self and the private, hidden away, hurt, and childlike self.

The married man described how his perfectionism and need for order was difficult for his wife and children to live with. He gave no sense of the quality of his relationship with his wife. He did say, however, that he did not like or trust women until he met his wife, and that he did not like his wife until she expressed an interest in him and worked to get to know him. Only one of the men spontaneously expressed a longing for close intimate relationships which, in his case, persisted despite a history of promiscuity and betrayal. One other subject talked about his growing understanding that he would have to learn to trust and be vulnerable before he could have a healthy relationship.

Hepburn's study has illuminated our understanding of the experience of men who as boys were sexually abused by someone they loved and trusted. He notes the extreme loneliness of these men whose protective isolation was fundamental to the way they lived their childhood abuse. Although Hepburn does not discuss this, it seems possible that the existential alienation experienced by male sexual abuse survivors is one of the

pervasive and enduring ways in which they continue to live their self-other-world relationships as adults. The question arises as to whether this would also be the case for women who were sexually abused as children. Earlier we have seen that some feminist psychologists have stressed that the self is relational in nature and that girls, more than boys, develop and maintain a sense of self within a world of close affiliations and emotional connectedness (Chodorow, 1978). In Paiser's (1991) study, the ten women she interviewed had been sexually abused by women, seven of them by their mothers, and all but one of them had also been abused by men. All these women continued to search for loving relationships, vacillating between their longing for intimacy and their fear of betrayal and further hurt. Paiser reports that they seemed to recognize that healing takes place "in the context of relating to others" (p.118).

Is the aftermath of child sexual abuse lived differently for women than men? How is it vicariously experienced by those who are the partners of women sexually abused as children? How is the sexual abuse experience lived relationally within the intimate world of the couple? This literature review suggests that an existential-phenomenological study is necessary in order to articulate the subjective and intersubjective experience of couples where the woman has been sexually abused as a child.

## METHODOLOGY

One of the aims of the literature review was to systematically appraise different theoretical perspectives from which a researcher could embark upon a study of the relational experience of couples where the woman is a survivor of child sexual abuse. The review concluded that what was called for was a deeper understanding of the essential and invariant meaning-structures of how human couples live the aftermath of child sexual abuse within their intimate relationships.

For this research project, the method of choice is a qualitative descriptive one based upon a human science rather than a natural science paradigm. Within the human science paradigm, the method we have selected is an existential-phenomenological one. Osborne (1994) recently undertook a review of the most commonly used psychological qualitative research methods as reported in the contemporary literature. In comparing an existential-phenomenological approach with other qualitative approaches like ethnography, participant observation, grounded theory, dramaturgical interviewing and content analysis, he emphasizes that the phenomenological method is unique in its rigour and its emphasis on descriptions of the meaning structures of lived experience.

From a phenomenological point of view, the methodology to be selected for a research project is predicated upon the nature of the research problem to be investigated. Results obtained from any research project can only reflect what questions the

researcher has asked and how these were addressed. When what is being sought is an understanding of the meaning of a lived human experience, then the method used should be one capable of grasping and articulating the structure of the meanings inherent in this experience.

### Rationale for an Existential-Phenomenological Approach

This approach to psychological research is philosophically grounded in an existential-phenomenological philosophy and in a human science paradigm as proposed by Dilthey nearly a century ago. It diverges from the path followed by mainstream psychology in its assertion that the subjective and objective realms of human nature cannot be separated. Furthermore, it states that what underlies the inseparability and co-constitutionality of self-other-world is the fact of intentionality. Husserl's idea of intentionality, based on the initial work of Brentano, describes the relation between consciousness and its content. In phenomenology, consciousness is understood to be always intentional, that is, it is always conscious of something and directed toward the world and to relationships in and with the world. Intentionality can only be directly experienced; it cannot be explained by a researcher in terms of his or her causal assumptions of what is externally observed. In an existential-phenomenological research project, the intentionality of consciousness, once described by a subject, can be grasped by a

researcher through use of a phenomenological methodology.

The human condition is complex and constantly eludes our efforts to understand it. Heidegger (1962/1926) emphasizes that the human being, called Dasein or Being-there, is in the world and cannot be understood apart from the world wherein he or she lives. It is through language and discourse that Dasein is expressed and understood. Merleau-Ponty (1962) has gone beyond Heidegger in his emphasis on the ontological importance of the body. His existential-phenomenology is radically relational in its view of self, body, other, and world. He holds that the human being is an embodied-subject-in-the-world, that behaviour as well as consciousness is intentional, and that language is a spoken gesture. It is through the lived body in its relationship with the world that emergent meanings are articulated, and it is through giving voice to what is experienced that meaning is known. Merleau-Ponty states that language "... presents or rather it is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings" (1962, p.193).

What gives us the temerity to try to understand the experience of others? For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen earlier, this comes from the fact that we are born into interrelatedness and intersubjectivity; hence we come to know others as we come to know ourselves. In discussing how we come to understand the other, he writes, "... it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a

familiar way of dealing with the world" (1962, p.354). As an embodied-subject-in-the-world, I have within myself the unique and paradoxical quality of reversibility. In the moment when I recognize the consciousness of the other, I am de-centered from myself and thus able to recognize both the presence of the self in the other and the presence of the other in the self. Merleau-Ponty expresses this thought fervently, "My experience of the other ... tears me away from myself and creates instead a mixture of myself and the other" (1962, pp.154-155).

The human science paradigm shares with that of the natural sciences the need for research methods to be systematic, rigorous, and precisely delineated. However, the two paradigms differ in that they are derived from different philosophies. In the natural science paradigm, which adheres to Cartesian dualism, the subject, in this case the investigator, and the object, or what is being investigated, are kept apart. This means that in mainstream psychological research the researcher strives to obtain as detached and objective a view of human beings as possible so that human behaviour can be explained in terms of what influences and directs it. The quest is for models which will explain why we do what we do and how predetermined outcomes can be altered most effectively. In contrast, psychology as human science, and in particular an existential-phenomenological approach, asserts the fundamental inseparability of subject from object and the co-constitutionality of being and world. In addition, it claims that there can be no separation between lived

experience and its meaning for our experience is lived as meaning. Regarded from this perspective, what the natural scientist calls scientific objectivity amounts to a violation of the intrinsic inseparability of mind and body as well as of individual and world.

An existential-phenomenological psychology seeks to disclose the what and how of ordinary and extraordinary human experience--what it means to forgive, to learn, to become a parent, to lose someone you love. At a philosophical level, the search is for what it means to be a human being in the world; a human being both steeped in an historical, social and cultural milieu and, at the same time, inevitably projected toward the future.

Given this rationale, an existential-phenomenological method was the approach of choice for this research project. The basic characteristics of this approach are outlined below. Thereafter, the specific method used in this study is delineated.

#### Basic Characteristics of Existential-Phenomenological Psychological Research

The phenomenological method, first proposed by Husserl, originated in philosophy and was later applied to psychology. For Husserl, the way in which human beings think about the world in which they live is called the natural attitude. By this, he means that accumulation of associations, biases, theoretical postulations, and everyday speculations which have naturally



attached themselves to our ideas about phenomena of the lived world. The phenomenological method requires a disciplined reflective reduction wherein the researcher systematically "brackets" or renders impotent the natural attitude. The researcher, having transformed his or her natural attitude into a phenomenological attitude, then engages in a focused reflection on the phenomenon being investigated and applies what Husserl called "free imaginative variation". In this latter process, the researcher takes each descriptive feature of the phenomena seen in its interrelated context, and varies it imaginatively to clarify whether or not it appears to be a truly invariant or essential constituent of the phenomena. The researcher thus, "reflects on the unreflected and aims to render the implicit explicit" (Mook, 1983). Giorgi (1985) has systematized the methodology of Husserl and its further elaboration by Merleau-Ponty to apply to phenomenological psychological research. This study will adhere to his systematization.

Existential-phenomenology embraces a descriptive research approach. Writing about phenomenological description, Husserl (1977) states, "Description means non-merely the pure expression of the seen but also the most far-reaching possible analysis of the seen into its moments to be unfolded intuitively" (pp. 20-21). For the existential-phenomenological method as systematized by Giorgi, legitimate data comprises written descriptions of concrete experiences given by naive subjects who have lived the experience. Often the researcher then interviews

the subjects in order to clarify meanings and ambiguities in the written protocol. Using written or oral descriptions is consistent with the phenomenological stance that if we want to know how an object, an event, or an experience is present to someone, we ask them to describe it as it appears to their consciousness.

For phenomenological research, what is sought is a description which, when read, resonates with a genuineness which is immediately apparent. Buytendijk has called this the "phenomenological nod", the sense that this is an experience we have had or can imagine having (in van Manen, 1990). Mook (1983) has raised questions about whether the written descriptions of naive subjects are necessarily sufficient, in and of themselves, to provide adequate data for research. She maintains that subjects often "know more than they are aware of, but this knowledge needs to be evoked" (p.6). She is concerned also that written descriptions can be sparse and limited when subjects have difficulty linguistically articulating their experience. Mook suggests that in some situations, a dialogical approach is called for. This means that the researcher, after reading the written description, engages in a dialogue with the subject in order to explore intended meanings and amplify and explicate different aspects of the lived experience. She observes that the dialogical approach "endorses the phenomenological reality of our intentional subjective-intersubjective relatedness and sees the phenomenon as manifesting itself in the realm of the in-between"

(pp.9-10). A dialogical interviewing approach was considered to be particularly relevant for a study such as ours because of the complexity and sensitivity of the phenomenon being investigated.

The existential-phenomenological method, as described above and as it will be used in this study, invites and values the active participation of the researcher in the co-constitution of the data. It requires the researcher to reflect and become aware of his or her preconceived notions so that all biases, theoretical and otherwise, can be brought to light and set aside while the data is being analysed. It acknowledges that the researcher's respectful and interested questioning can help individuals to bring forth a deeper and richer portrayal of their lived experience of the phenomenon (Mook, 1983). In phenomenological research, "researcher and subject are both seen as meaningfully present in the research situation but in divergent ways that must be properly explicated each time" (Giorgi, 1985, p.78).

In existential-phenomenological research, the understanding of the concept of science has been broadened and as such goes beyond the concepts of conventional natural science. The phenomenological method has its own criteria of scientific research which are consistent with its theory of human beings and congruent with the nature of the phenomena being investigated. In phenomenological research, what is sought is a deeper understanding, one that approaches "the most comprehensive invariant meanings" (Giorgi, 1985, p.70) of a human experience

lived subjectively and intersubjectively.

The question of whether phenomenological research should be discussed in terms of validity and reliability is a recurrent one. Giorgi (1988) has addressed this issue, and gives full credence to why questions of validity and reliability are entirely appropriate for the natural science model. However, he maintains that these questions need to be reformulated for phenomenological research. Within the phenomenological framework, he finds it more appropriate to address the question of whether the researcher can make, what Salner (1986) calls "a defensible knowledge claim", for his or her particular research findings. In phenomenological research, he suggests:

The strong knowledge claim is based upon all of the precautions taken in trying to arrive at an accurate description; the reduction, the use of imaginative variation, the limiting of the claim to pure possibilities, etc. (Giorgi, 1988, p.173).

The use of the phenomenological method ensures that all aspects of the phenomenon being investigated are systematically and imaginatively varied, and it is this multiple perspective which lends validity to findings. Within the human science paradigm, research findings have validity if they are respectful of and faithful to the phenomenon investigated. Wertz (1984) refers to the criterion of internal cohesiveness, by which he means that all the constituents of the general structure of the phenomenon can be shown to come implicitly or explicitly from the

transformed meaning units in the original descriptions. Salner (1986) also challenges the relevance of the traditional concepts of validity and reliability for phenomenological research. She maintains that findings have validity to the extent that they provide the kind of evidence of an expanded understanding which the researcher can defend before the academic community.

When considering the question of the reliability of a particular phenomenological study, one can say that reliability has been attained if one can use the description of the general structure consistently (Giorgi, 1988). Giorgi (1988) reminds us that the possibility for error will always exist no matter how conscientious the researcher may be. He acknowledges that "there are no guarantees, only checks and balances, and primarily the checks and balances come through the use of demonstrative procedures" (p.173). To summarize, findings are reliable to the extent that they derive from a faithfully adhered to and clearly delineated research method in which the researcher has been included as a participant-observer.

The question of whether the findings of a phenomenological study are generalizable is also one which calls for a reformulation. The general structure of the phenomenon is a distillation of the multiplicity of its interrelated meaning constituents and thus already both general and essential (A. Giorgi, personal communication, April 29, 1995). Osborne (1994) has referred to the criterion of "empathic generalizability". By this, he means that findings are generalizable to the extent that

others who have shared the same lived experience recognize their lived experience as revealed and articulated in the general meaning structure of the phenomenon. He also goes beyond this by suggesting that findings have "empathic generalizability" if readers who have not shared the same experience intuitively feel, when they read it, that the description "fits" their sense of how the phenomena would be lived.

Phenomenological findings are not held dogmatically; one does not claim that the given is what it appears to be. Ultimately the criterion by which the research findings is to be judged is whether or not they are useful in yielding an expanded understanding of the phenomenon and opening up new possibilities for dialogue and change.

#### Phenomenological Research Method for this Study

##### Pilot Study

In order to assess the appropriateness of the specific phenomenological method for this research project, a pilot study was conducted. One couple was recruited for this purpose and each partner was asked to respond, in writing, to two research questions. Each partner was then interviewed individually. The specific aim of the pilot study was to determine whether the research questions asked, the procedures followed, and the timing, number, and order of the interviews would effectively access the phenomenon being investigated. Following the pilot study, a decision was made to combine the two research questions

asked of the pilot couple into one combined question. In view of the relational nature of the phenomenon being investigated, it was also decided to conduct a joint interview with the couple after they had responded in writing to the research question, and before they were interviewed individually.

#### Selection of Participants

Three couples were selected to take part in the study. In order to ensure some measure of consistency, heterosexual couples were selected according to the following criteria: (a) couples co-habiting for not less than two years, (b) the woman having been sexually abused for the first time during the pre-adolescent years, (c) the perpetrator being a male relative at least five years older than the child he abused, and (d) the woman being in psychotherapy or having access to a psychotherapist with whom she had worked in the past. Sexual abuse was defined as explicit and exploitative sexual bodily contact (Russell, 1986).

Suitable couples were recruited through colleagues who were mental health professionals. Colleagues were asked to discuss the study with any of their clients they thought might be willing to be involved, and who they felt would not be overly distressed by writing and talking about their experience with the researcher. When a client informed her therapist that she and her partner might be willing to participate, the therapist notified the primary investigator.

### Initial Meeting

Once a suitable couple had been selected, the primary investigator arranged a meeting to discuss the research project more fully and enable the couple to ask questions. Because of the nature of the phenomenon being investigated, it was crucial that participants did not feel exploited in any way by the requirements of the project. The researcher made sure that each participant had access to emotional support in case the process was upsetting. The right to discontinue at any time was explained. Anonymity was guaranteed and the requirements of the project were discussed in detail before the participants were asked to sign consent forms approved by the University of Ottawa's Ethics Committee (See Appendix A). A brief interview was then conducted with both participants present. The partners were asked certain questions of information in order to ensure that the selection criteria had been met. These questions included age at which the abuse took place, relationship to the perpetrator, nature and duration of the abuse, age at which the abuse was disclosed to the partner, current age, occupation, and previous marital history. Background information about the couples involved in the study can be found in Appendix B.

The procedure was slightly modified at this stage. The first couple interviewed had two very young children. They expressed concern about having to come in together on two separate occasions and requested that the joint research interview commence right away. A decision was made to respect



their wishes, and this modified procedure was also used with the other couples in order to ensure consistency.

Joint Research Interview.

The researcher presented the couple with the following research question both orally and in writing:

What has it been like for you to be living in an intimate relationship when one of you is healing from childhood sexual abuse. Please describe in concrete detail at least one specific situation in your relationship where the past abuse emerged in explicit awareness for you.

An audio-taped interview lasting approximately one and a half hours ensued. At the end of the interview, each partner was given a written copy of the research question. Participants were asked to write their response to the question and each partner was given a stamped return envelope so that the written protocol could be returned to the primary researcher within a week.

It was explained to the couples that what was being sought was a concrete and faithful description of their day-to-day lived relational experience including at least one specific example of an event which actually took place. It was suggested that the example chosen by each participant should be one which would bring to light the meaning of how they are living their relationship. The participants were reminded to keep their descriptions as close to what they have been experiencing as possible and to give concrete details. They were asked not to try to produce a polished piece of prose or interpret their experience but just to describe events which tell what it has been for them. Each participant was also given a copy of the

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976), and asked to complete this and return it when they returned their written protocol.

### Individual Research Interviews

When the written protocols were received, the researcher transcribed and read them carefully. She then noted places on the transcription where clarification or further elaboration were required, before conducting an audio-taped interview lasting approximately one and a half to two hours with each partner separately.

The researcher's first task, in both the joint and the individual interviews, was to establish an atmosphere of safety, respect, and genuine interest in order that the participants would feel free to elaborate upon their experience. The interview was regarded as a collaborative endeavor to reveal more of the specific lived phenomenon. In this sense, interviews were discovery-oriented and the intention was to let the phenomenon being researched show itself.

In the phenomenological method, as systematized by Giorgi (1985), questions are asked to clarify ambiguities of meaning in the written descriptions of concrete experience. Van Manen (1990) discusses the researcher's need to guide the interview process by staying grounded in the fundamental research question. He advocates that questions should stay close to the text and, if necessary, ask for more detail, for specific responses, for concrete illustrations, and for examples. Mook (1983) endorses

these guidelines for questioning in phenomenological research interviews but suggests that there are some situations which call for a dialogical approach to interviewing. The intent of a dialogical interview, as used in this study, is to enable participants to go beyond what they have written or, potentially, beyond what they have previously been able to articulate, in order to give the richest and fullest description of the phenomenon as they are presently living it.

#### Data Analysis

After the interviews, the audio-taped interview data was faithfully transcribed by the researcher and this, together with the transcriptions of the written protocols, served as the primary data for further analysis. Because the data from the first two couples was considered sufficient and adequate for the purposes of the project, the data from the third couple was excluded from analysis. All the data of the remaining two couples was systematically analyzed according to the four steps of the phenomenological-psychological method devised by Giorgi (1985):

1. Sense of the Whole: The researcher reads the transcript as many times as necessary in order to get a holistic sense of what has been written. This involves grasping the general sense and language of the text.
2. Discrimination of Meaning Units: Because it is impossible to analyze the whole text at once, Giorgi's method involves breaking it down into meaning units. In order to do this, the researcher

assumes a psychological attitude toward the description and retains a focus on the phenomenon being researched. Assuming a psychological attitude or frame of mind implies an attuned awareness toward expressions which have psychological meaning for the subject. A meaning unit ends when the researcher senses a shift in meaning for the subject. This stage involves what Giorgi (1985) refers to as an attitude of disciplined spontaneity. From the phenomenological perspective, meaning units do not exist as precisely delineated units of study in the text. Instead, he states, "They exist only in relation to the attitude and set of the researcher" (Giorgi, 1985, p.15).

### 3. Transformation of Subject's Everyday Language into

Psychological Language: Here again the researcher constantly stays grounded and focused on the phenomenon being investigated. The purpose of this stage is "... to make thematic the subjects's perceptions and intentions ... which are important to understand how this description can evolve into an example of the phenomenon ..." (Giorgi, 1985, p.19). The researcher engages in a rigorous process in which all pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions must be "bracketed" or consciously set aside. A cyclical process of reflection and imaginative variation is engaged in for each meaning unit. Imaginative variation involves a dialogue with the meaning unit to find the essential way in which it elucidates the phenomenon. Imaginative variation requires that the researcher transpose constituents, vary phrases and labels, and play with different formulations before using psychological language to

express an essential meaning which stays true to the described experience. This stage of the analysis aims to make explicit the psychological meanings that were implicit in the subject's life-world.

#### 4. Synthesis of Transformed Meaning Units into a Consistent

Statement of the Structure of the Phenomenon: Situated structures remain close to the concrete lived experience of participants but help to organize the wealth of transformed meaning units into a structure which reveals the phenomenon more clearly. The process of formulating situated structures involves deeply reflecting upon all the transformed meaning units derived from the original data. The researcher, through disciplined reflection and imaginative variation, comes to an articulated understanding of the structural unity of the interrelated nature of the psychological constituents implicit in the lived experience of the phenomenon.

In our study there were two stages to this endeavour. The first involved synthesizing and integrating the transformed meaning units from the written protocols and from the individual and joint interviews. This resulted in ten situated structures which expressed how the phenomenon was being lived by the participants. The second stage involved combining the two situated structures for each individual (one from the written protocol and one from the interview) into one combined situated structure for each individual. Thus there were a total of three situated structures for each of the two couples involved.

Giorgi (1985) has pointed out that in phenomenological research, much more so than in traditional research, "one has the freedom to express findings in multiple ways" (p.20). A general structure can be articulated in a highly succinct and concentrated form (Wertz, 1985) or the analysis can be discussed in a more elaborate and thematic way including illustrative quotations from participants so that the poignancy and vividness of the lived experience is conveyed to the reader (Cosgrove, 1987; Hepburn, 1993; Wertz, 1985).

A decision was made not to take the analysis to the next possible stage of articulating a general meaning structure for the phenomenon, in order to remain faithful to the unique experience of each individual and couple (A. Giorgi, personal communication, January 8, 1996). Rather, it was decided to show the thematic commonalities and variations amongst the constituent meanings in each situated structure as revealed by the phenomenological analysis and to present these in a separate chapter.

## RESULTS I:

### Situated Structures

The results of our phenomenological analysis are presented in two parts: firstly the situated structures and secondly the commonalities and variations amongst the subjective and intersubjective themes. In this first section we present the situated meaning structures for the two couples, starting with the situated structure for the joint interview with each couple and followed by combined structures for each partner. In the combined structures, we have integrated the situated structure for each participant's written response to the research question, with the situated structure for his or her individual interview. The situated structures for the joint interviews are revealing of the more public and perhaps more cautious expression of the lived experience of each couple, who were meeting with the researcher for the first time. The combined structures for the individual partners are more explicitly revealing of the nuances and complex meanings of how each person is presently living their intimate relationship. Redundancies between the joint and individual interviews were deliberately left in so as not to distort the meaning of what each participant chose to express during each interview.

Background information and assessment data about the subjects can be found in Appendix B. Some highly significant differences between the life experiences of the two women and the two men are briefly referred to in this appendix. Transcriptions

of written protocols for all subjects can be found in Appendix C. An example of the phenomenological analysis of one transcribed interview showing the discrimination and transformation of meaning units can be found in Appendix D. Transcripts of all interviews and analyses showing the discrimination and transformation of meaning units for all written protocols and interviews are available upon request.

In presenting the results, we have used the following codes to represent the participants: W = Wife; H = Husband; R = Researcher. For couple No.1 the codes for their children are: S = Son and D = Daughter. For couple No.2 the codes for their children are: D1 = Daughter from the husband's first marriage, and D2 = Daughter born to H2 and W2.

#### Situated Structure of Joint Interview with Couple No.1

When they first met, as graduate students, H felt drawn to W by her lively and outgoing way of being, her active engagement in life, and her uncompromising determination to pursue an independent professional career. He also found her sexually attractive, which he considered to be an essential requirement for an intimate relationship. W recalls that initially she did not pay much attention to H, discounting him as too soft spoken but later his apparent perceptiveness evoked her interest. She appreciated that he was not "macho", but instead displayed a quiet self-confidence of his own. Being in his company was like entering an oasis of peace and she thought of him as "an old



soul". Previously, W had lived with a man who wanted her to conform to his preconceived ideas about how she should be. In contrast, she was riveted when H declared that all he wanted was for her to realize her own dreams and become the person she herself wanted to be. This made him unique in her eyes.

Presently, their first priority is to provide a consistent and stable home life for their two small children. Being a parent is hard work but H declares that he finds it personally and relationally enriching in its own way. He perceives himself as striving for fairness and mutuality in all aspects of their relationship. Optimistically, H expresses the belief that he and W are co-creating personal and professional lives which are more satisfying than either of them could create on their own. However, H deeply regrets that since becoming parents, his desire for a deeper and more exciting intimate relationship with W has been temporarily curtailed, ostensibly because they are so busy devoting themselves to the management of their domestic and career responsibilities.

W sadly agrees that their intimate relationship has suffered. She fears it has also been damaged by the stress of a complicated pregnancy followed by an extensive period during which she often felt despondent, joyless, and depleted of her normal resources of energy. During this time, W also frequently experienced herself as emotionally drained and overwhelmed. Feeling this way arouses in her a compelling need to escape, and she tends to signal her need to be left alone by becoming

irritable. Often H sees this coming before she does and encourages her to take time for herself before she loses her temper. During the past year, there have been times when H has desired intimate closeness with her and she either felt she did not have the strength to respond to him or desperately needed just to be left alone in order to try to restore herself. W appreciates how patient and supportive H has been through this difficult and painful time and, as she slowly regains her sense of well-being, she feels hopeful that their relationship is also improving.

H reveals that he first experienced a loss of their early intimacy when he had to move to another city and he and W were separated for six months. After W joined him, she promptly became pregnant with their first child. Hearing H claim that he has been experiencing a loss of intimate closeness for four years takes W by surprise, for she has only been aware of a decline in their intimate relationship since her second pregnancy. W now wonders whether she might have been unaware that there was less intimacy in their marital relationship because she was feeling generally happy with her life after the birth of their first baby and so did not miss it.

Reflecting upon what would improve their present intimate relationship, W suggests they need time to be alone together. For her, this means time to be romantic, to talk about ideas as they used to, and to engage in interests they share, like skiing. But H disagrees that insufficient time together is the primary

problem, especially since they have been trying to ensure that they go out more often. For him, the problem is that W is rarely interested in being intimate with him. She is usually too tired at night and then gets up early in the morning to take care of the children, which leaves, in his words, a "very short window" for their intimate life together. W agrees that her lack of interest in sex is a problem, acknowledging that her energy "goes down the tubes" at night. In addition, she often feels too exhausted to make herself go out and exercise, which she knows from experience, would probably improve her vitality. W expresses her appreciation for the fact that H encourages her to exercise and is willing to take care of the children when he gets back from work. H, implying that his motives are not entirely altruistic, declares that he is happy to be with the children at the end of the day and besides, he also benefits when W is feeling better.

In an intellectual and intense way, H expounds upon his view that what is missing in their relationship is a mutual commitment to what he calls their "intimate project". He explains that this means a mutual desire to share their dreams and aspirations and plan together how to actualize them. This he regards as crucial to their relational life. He fears they have abandoned their intimate project because it takes emotional energy to foster it and, presently, it seems that all their energy is being diverted into the management of their domestic and professional obligations. In his view, getting stuck in day to day management

leaves no room for spontaneity, or surprise, or sudden sparks of attraction, all of which, he feels, add zest to an intimate relationship and give it its special meaning.

It surprises W to hear H describe what he calls their "intimate project" in this way. She had previously assumed that what H was primarily missing was more sexual intimacy. Now she begins to see more clearly that he has experienced the loss of that lively spontaneity and spark in her which he believes is needed to ignite the special feeling of closeness between them. Lest she overlook its importance, H quickly interjects that sex is an essential part of an intimate project because it contributes its own special magic to the relationship. But he elaborates upon his view that spontaneity is born out of a vital creativity which gives human beings a sense of being fully alive and that there are many different ways that this can be expressed.

With a sigh, W owns that since the birth of their daughter she has felt almost no spontaneous sexual desire. She has felt over-burdened by all her responsibilities and this, she senses, has had a dampening effect on her spontaneity and played a part in her loss of sexual desire. W recognizes how she contributes to this by allowing herself to get caught up in cycles of excessive fretting about domestic responsibilities which, in turn, heightens her stress. She wonders whether she is just too tired to feel any sexual desire at present and reports finding it reassuring to hear other women say that they too lost interest in

sex when they had very young children to take care of.

Searching as to how to explain her present lack of interest in sex, W admits she is confused. She has wondered whether there is a connection between her lack of desire and the fact that she was sexually abused as a child. She has also wondered whether she has an unnaturally low desire for sex compared to other women. But if this is the case, would she have been different if she had not been sexually abused? She ruminates but is usually left with a pervasive sense of not knowing. Occasionally, however, events occur in which she detects a clear connection between her present sexual behaviour and her previous abuse. For instance, at times, when some aspect of love-making with H evokes a memory of her father, a sudden feeling of revulsion will sweep through her body.

Through her relationship with H, W has become aware of how being sexually abused by her father may have robbed her of her ability to readily trust others. She acknowledges that she has come to trust H more than any other man in her life, but she also knows that her trust is still partial. Allowing herself to be open and vulnerable with a man is very difficult for her and she senses that the more intimate their relationship, the harder it is. Rationally she knows H is trustworthy, but emotionally she has not been able to feel that she can safely place herself in his hands. She lives her relationship warily, with mistrust always lurking beneath the surface.

H uses a metaphor to illustrate how he experiences trust and mistrust in their relationship. He describes himself as continually making payments of trustworthy acts into W's emotional bank account. But regardless of how many payments he has made, a perceived mistake of his, can cause a disproportionately huge withdrawal from her bank account and he needs to start building up the trust account all over again. W does not deny that this is an accurate picture of what happens between them. She connects her sudden surges of mistrust with the awareness that suddenly she is not in control of her life-world and the fear that this feeling arouses in her. In trying to make sense of her behaviour, W has become aware of the pervasive influence of fear in her life.

In his own efforts to understand W's problems with trust, H ventures the opinion that W's public image is very important to her. He believes this is why a remark he might make, which in W's view diminishes the image she wants to convey to others, can lead to such a quick flare-up of mistrust. But W does not agree with his interpretation. She feels that the behaviour H has described is illustrative of her insecurity, rather than her mistrust or fear. She owns that sometimes she cares too much about what others think of her and attributes this to still unresolved insecurities from her childhood. For example, an ongoing problem between them is her feeling of aversion toward her body. Her frequent expressions of disgust for her appearance and her pervasive self-loathing are particularly difficult for H

to live with. W has interpreted that her striving for perfection, her dissatisfaction with her appearance, and her self-depreciation have their origins in the critical and judgmental attitude of her parents. She feels that growing up with them has left her acutely sensitive to having attention drawn to any of her fallibilities. For example, she becomes very upset if H ever publicly says something about her that leaves her feeling exposed to criticism.

While exploring what happens when there is a disagreement between them, W comments that H tends to hold his feelings inside and emotionally withdraw from her when they get into arguments. H agrees that he was brought up not to show his feelings. In his view, when an argument seems to be going around in circles or when it has been blown out of all proportion to the event which precipitated it, it is better just to let things cool off for a while. H claims that W, on the other hand, does not know when to stop "beating a dead horse", and W does not disagree with him. In his opinion, far from avoiding conflict, W "creates it like a bull". W agrees that she is not afraid to be confrontational although, at the same time, she does not intend to be hurtful and cause pain. In her family, broaching a sensitive topic was strongly disapproved of. Any talk about feelings was promptly quashed and this sometimes led W to mistrust her own experience. Nevertheless, she often felt driven to express her feelings and speak out on forbidden topics for which she was labeled a trouble maker. Upon reflection, W sees her resultant suffering as

inevitable: either she had to stifle her feelings, which felt awful, or she would drag matters out into the open and upset the whole family. W feels that in her adult friendships and as a counselor, she has learned to control her anger and to express herself carefully so as not to jeopardize relationships. However, she confesses that she is not always careful enough when she is in a disagreement with H.

For his part, H rationalizes that he rarely loses his temper or raises his voice except when he is tired. However, he agrees with W that since living together he is more likely to lose his temper, which he relates to the increased stress associated with child-rearing and to the fact that W encourages him to express his anger. Whereas in the past, he might have kept quiet when something upset him or approached the issue in a round-about way, he now tends to speak-up more directly. However, he finds that this often thrusts him into an intense conflict with W, which is more than he bargained for. Consequently, he is far from convinced that confrontation is the best way to deal with differences and personally he continues to favour a more rational, judicious, approach.

Reflecting upon the strengths of their relationship, H expresses his view that the mutual support they give each other is most important, in addition to the fact that they have a sense of direction and a determination to be fully alive. He feels that determination allied with creativity will help them to find the way through difficulties which arise. From W's point of



view, their relationship is strong because they are committed to their marriage and their children and have a sense of belonging together despite their difficulties. Another strength that she values is their ability to talk together openly. W considers herself to be willing to admit to imperfections, mistakes and problems and she has noticed an increasing willingness on H's part to do this more often.

Both H and W perceive their relationship as improving, having weathered the past year during which W felt bereft of both her emotional and physical well-being. This was a very hard time for H too in that he was profoundly aware of how W was struggling with the stress of caring for the children while at the same time feeling despondent and depleted of energy. However, there were times when he felt it would have been easier if she had just left him to look after the children and taken time away to rest and recover her strength. H perceived the situation as grave, and felt he did his best to be patient, believing that W's problems were physiological in origin and would improve. It helped him that he did not feel personally responsible for her suffering. During this period, he decided they should give themselves two years to assess whether their relationship was continuing to slide downhill or starting to move in a more positive direction.

Neither of them has considered leaving the other. W believes that when she feels unhappy in their relationship, it is usually because she is feeling tired and despondent and, consequently, looking at the whole world with jaundiced eyes. Although she

never felt suicidal, there were times when she experienced herself as drowning and having lost her hope and her kindling spark. She kept trying to convince herself that things would get better and thankfully there were encouraging signs, but still she felt her suffering was lasting a long time. What she has just lived through has clarified for W that she does not want to risk another pregnancy. Although H would have liked more children, he is accepting of W's decision, for he understands that no matter how hard he tries to share the responsibilities of child-rearing it is not he who has to live through being pregnant, giving birth and staying home while the children are little.

Speculating about what might put an end to their relationship, W replies that if one of the children died she would envisage herself falling apart and that might destroy the relationship. H affirms that he has similar feelings about what might happen if one of the children died. However, he believes what would be most detrimental to their relationship is the lack of a full and mutual commitment to their intimate project. H considers that being engaged in an intimate project together is essential for the survival of their relationship. Without this, he fears that their life together could be permanently reduced to day to day management. In his perception, this is how his parents have lived their life and this is anathema to him. For H, if in the future he were to look back on his relational life with W and see that it had been made up of an endless series of management decisions about practicalities, he would consider

their life together to have been meaningless.

W searches for a fuller understanding of what H means by their intimate project and what it means to him personally. She explains that she experiences her relationship with him as a place to grow. Through their mutual dialogue, she explores herself through him, grows in self-understanding, and experiences herself more fully. In W's words, this shared communion, "gives me more understanding of myself through you, through understanding you and through understanding me too." H interprets what W says to mean that she is seeking a more profound understanding of her inner self. To him, her focus is self-directed or inward. In contrast, he feels that his focus is directed outward - to the actual events happening between them in the relationship. H contends that it is through living life to the full, actively creating excitement between them, sharing dreams and physical intimacy together, that he will be able to make sense of who he is.

W argues that H's expression means that he too is embarked on an inward quest to understand himself better. She then tries to reconcile their differences by suggesting that the outward and the inward are inseparable and essential aspects of the same phenomenon. But, H persists in his view that inward and outward are opposite modes of being and that those who primarily live in one mode, desire and seek the other to create a balance. He elaborates upon his sense that he and W complement each other and seek to express the characteristics they admire in the other.

For example, he is trying to become more lively and assertive like W, while he perceives W to be engaged in a reflective quest for deeper understanding, which he associates with his own way of being. But W responds to this from a paradigmatically different world view when she contends that H is describing parts of a whole which cannot be dichotomized since both are present at all times.

H stresses again that he has been feeling the loss of W's characteristic liveliness and initiative in their intimate project and experiences himself as patiently waiting for her to recover her vitality. W interrupts him to ask, somewhat anxiously, what he imagines would happen to their relationship if she did not recover her spark. In a reassuring voice, H responds that since this would not be a change she sought for herself, it would be something they would have to contend with together. In conclusion, both H and W remark that they appreciated this opportunity to talk about their intimate relationship and W adds that she was surprised by some of H's revelations.

Combined Situated Structure of Written Protocol and Interview  
with Wife of Couple No.1

In reflecting upon how her past sexual abuse is lived within her intimate relationship with her husband, W reveals that there are times when the abuse feels explicitly present for her but, more often, she lives its aftermath ambiguously. Speaking in a qualified and hesitant manner, she wonders whether it is common for women in long-term relationships to experience a lack of

sexual desire for their husbands or whether her experience is specifically related to having been abused by her father. She intuits that her confusion about this may itself be a reflection of unresolved and ambivalent feelings toward her father. W relates how some months after his death, she dreamed she was freely making love to her father as a young handsome man. In the dream, she revelled in her sexual pleasure, unhampered by either guilt or restraint. Awakening sexually aroused, W for the first time in a long while, felt that she wanted to make love to her husband. Upon reflection, W realized that feeling sexually attracted rather than repelled by her father was paradoxically liberating in that it aroused her dormant desire. Although unsure about the meaning of her dream, W suspects that being sexually abused by her father as a child may at least partially account for her current lack of sexual desire for her husband.

Lately, W has been wondering why she continues to be sexually attracted to the kind of men who seem to derive pleasure from exerting their power over others. She perceives this attraction as a troublesome moral contradiction within herself. Speaking haltingly and with a sigh, W admits that the erotic appeal of powerful, dominating men probably has its origin in the fact that her father was a powerful man who coerced her into performing sexual acts with him. W now recognizes that being abused by her father meant that, as a young woman, she was vulnerable to the seductions of men who ignored her feelings in pressuring her to satisfy their sexual needs. From her early

twenties, she was involved in a long-term relationship with a partner who controlled, dominated and demeaned her, both personally and sexually. The initial passion and erotic desire she felt for this man were destroyed as she became increasingly distressed by the high-handed, callous, and uncaring way in which she felt he treated her. In the end, sex with him felt "terrible" and "abusive". After extricating herself from this involvement, W continued to find it erotically appealing to be dominated sexually although, from then on, she consciously rebelled against any man who tried to control her personal life.

Her second long-term relationship felt so different that she experienced herself, like a pendulum, going from one extreme to the other. This new partner was not overtly dominating and powerful as the previous one had been. What drew her to him was the extraordinary emotional closeness she experienced in their early encounters, evoking for her the rare delight of having found a soul-mate. If they made love at these times, their sexual encounters were very exciting for her, in the sense that she felt swept into his passionate sexual experience and lived this vicariously. However, after a while, W found it disconcerting that whenever it was she who expressed a desire to make love, her forwardness seemed to frighten him. Gradually, W began to sense the solitary inward-turning nature of her partner's erotic life, in which her aroused body was there solely for his pleasure, while her needs were overlooked. She suspected that her sexual pleasure was unimportant to him and this

contributed to her inability to experience an orgasm during their sexual encounters. This relationship was also flawed in that periods of intense closeness were interspersed with times when her partner surrendered to lengthy periods of despondency. During these times, he would push her away, leaving her feeling as if a door had been closed in her face. She felt alternately pulled and pushed by his mood swings and began to perceive him as ineffectual and unable to express his anger. But, although their relationship was flawed, it was hard for W to leave this man because she so cherished the good times when she felt emotionally close to him.

With her husband, W experiences a balance and a mutuality between them which were absent from her two previous long-term relationships. She appreciates that she is now in an intimate relationship where power is not an issue. Neither she nor H seek to dominate each other personally or sexually. Ironically, before they met, W tended to discount men like H who seemed gentle and unassuming, considering them to be boring and dispensable. She found powerful and challenging men more exciting even though they inevitably left her wounded. However, shortly after they met, W began to realize that H was very different from the men she had previously been interested in. When she overheard him conversing with others, she began to perceive his quiet strength, and she noticed that there was more substance to his thinking than she initially gave him credit for.

With H, her sexual life has been very different. Shortly after they began to be lovers, H became aware that there were times when she was no longer present to him in their love-making. It was astonishing to W that H noticed when she emotionally removed herself. She could not recall any other man paying such close attention to her responsiveness during sex or, in her words, caring about what she was "feeling and thinking and doing and where I was". Together they came to understand that, during their love-making, W was somehow disengaging her conscious awareness from her bodily experiencing. W feels she may have started to do this as a way of protecting herself emotionally while her father was sexually abusing her.

H was the first man with whom she experienced an orgasm. He was also the first to encourage her to become more aware of her own sexual needs and pleasures, instead of just being a passive participant in the sexual expression of another. Initially, she found this suggestion alarming. The idea that she had the right to know her own sexual needs or ask for them to be met by another, was completely foreign to her. Furthermore, she was afraid that exploring her own sexuality would require her to be more open and trusting of H. Gradually, W learned she could trust H sexually and, because he has been so attentive to her needs, she feels she has been able to experience a heightened sexual pleasure herself. However, it saddens her that she tends to feel emotionally distant from H during their love-making. She finds it ironic that she used to accuse her first partner of just



wanting sex and no emotional closeness, and now she feels it is she who is just having sex. W longs for the intense emotional closeness which she experienced at times with her second partner but which she feels is missing from her sexual relationship with H.

W wonders whether she may have exchanged her desire for a passionate and forceful sexual partner for an overriding need to be with a man who would not dominate and control her personal life, assuming she could not have both. It has occurred to her that the qualities which make H the man with whom she wants to have a mutual and loving marital relationship, may not be those which arouse her desire and passion in love-making. W reflects that her more satisfactory sexual relationships have been with men who initially she did not find sexually attractive. W is aware that her lack of sexual desire for H is an extremely sensitive topic to broach with him given that he has expressed his conviction that a strong mutual sexual attraction is indispensable to satisfactory couple relationships. She does not want him to think she does not find him sexually attractive. Until now, W has tried to account for the infrequency of their love-making by blaming her fatigue, but she knows this is only a partial explanation. She has learned that some women who have been sexually abused report finding it harder to freely express their sexual desire as they grow emotionally closer to their partners, and she wonders whether she may have started to protectively wall off her sexual desire as she and H grew closer.

It concerns W that they have only just begun to confront the sexual problems they are experiencing.

H has told W he would like their sexual relationship to be more passionate, implying that he too is missing a more intense emotional participation during love-making. In the past, W might have blamed herself for this, but lately she has been feeling that the responsibility is not hers alone. It seems to her, that H does not surrender to his own passion or express it in a way that arouses her sexual desire and heightens the intensity between them. She has the sense that they are both holding back and waiting for the other to evoke their passion. W has suggested to H that if he wants her to be more passionate, he should try to express his own passion more freely and she confesses, with some embarrassment, that she has also asked him to be more physically forceful and even rough with her. But she reveals that H seemed to find her suggestion amusing, perhaps not grasping the implication that W may need to experience some forcefulness and emotional expressiveness from her partner in order to be fully drawn into a mutually passionate encounter. It was difficult for W to make this request of H and she feels somewhat frustrated that he has not been more responsive. Although W understands that it is not easy to keep passion alive in long-term relationships, she is not ready to accept a life without it and would like to find a way to kindle more fire in their love-making.

W acknowledges that it has been difficult for them to discuss the acutely sensitive issue of their current sexual problems in the direct way in which they are able to discuss other issues. W truly appreciates the fact that, from the start of their relationship, she and H have enjoyed a close and open dialogue about values, ideas and their personal lives. W grew up with parents who, in her perception, kept their feelings to themselves and rarely confided in each other. It did not, therefore, surprise her when she and her first partner were not able to communicate comfortably. Given what she learned by observing her parents' relationship, the kind of open, mutually exploring dialogue that she enjoyed with her close friends was not something she expected to find in a marital partner. But in H, she feels she has found a man who is not only her sexual partner but also her best friend and she treasures being able to confide in him. She finds he listens well, shows a genuine interest in what she has to say, and is responsive to her concerns.

W claims she is more willing to admit she has faults and problems than H is. When they first met, she speculated that his aversion to criticism might stem from his parents unrealistic demands of him as their first-born child. Subsequently, W has come to appreciate that, unlike the other men she has been with, H at least expresses a willingness to change and is increasingly prepared to take responsibility for his part in problems that arise between them. But W senses that H is fearful of looking at

himself and exploring his own vulnerability. She feels one of the reasons he wanted to marry her was that he admired her courage in facing her problems and making changes. She senses he is relying on her to be the catalyst for change and growth in their relationship.

However, during the past year and a half since the birth of their daughter, W has felt drained of her vitality and vigour which previously enlivened their intimate relationship. She senses that H is living this as loss. W partly blames hormonal changes related to her pregnancy for the fatigue and despondency she has been struggling with and has, therefore, decided not to risk having more children. Feeling low and depleted of energy for so long was very frightening for W. No matter how hard she tried, she felt powerless to throw off her despondent mood and she began to fear she might never be herself again. Having previously lived with an intimate partner who felt despondent for long periods of time, W knows how difficult this can be. She has been touched by how stoic and patient H has been in enduring with her through this difficult time.

Shortly before she met H, there was another lengthy period in her life when W felt despondent, bleak and existentially alone. A critical series of events seems to have precipitated this misery and compelled her to recognize that relationships with men were extremely problematic for her. During this time, W sought counselling and considers this one of the best decisions she ever made. Through counselling, she became aware that she

was relating to sexual partners in a way that mirrored the abusive relationship she experienced with her father. Even when she sensed a relationship was harmful to her, she could not let go of it. She came to understand that in not being able to extricate herself from damaging sexual relationships, she was, in a sense, re-living unresolved and ambivalent feelings about being with and breaking away from her abusive father.

While struggling to heal from the sexual abuse and make sense of her feelings for her father, W began to get a clearer picture of the role which her mother played in her suffering. As a child, W did not experience her mother as an actively caring person in whom she could safely confide. Looking back on her childhood, W feels she did not tell her mother about the abuse because intuitively she did not trust that her mother would believe her or take her side against her father. W was upset when, after she finally revealed the whole story a few years ago, her mother decided not to leave her marriage. She claimed that she would have left W's father years ago if she had only known about the abuse at the time it was occurring. But W believes her mother cannot admit, even to herself, that she would never have left, especially since this would have meant having to bring up five little children on her own. Recently, W has begun to feel closer to her mother and has been able to express some compassion for the awful dilemma with which her mother would have been faced, had she told her about the abuse at the time. With great sadness, W reveals that she has had to accept that her mother's

primary commitment and loyalty was to her husband and that, given the choice, she would not have broken up her marriage to save her daughter from her terrible predicament.

W sighs as she reports that her father died six months ago. Although distanced from him for some years prior to this, she felt extremely sad that they had never been able to resolve what happened between them. Her father was deeply humiliated when, a few years ago, she revealed their jointly held secret that he had sexually abused her. However, he was never able to talk about his pain and humiliation. Always a withdrawn man, he withdrew further, retreating from the world and turning in upon himself. W recalls that he would no longer meet her eyes when they were together. He would keep up a flow of nervous chatter, apparently not hearing anything she said. This felt dreadful to her and she understood his behaviour to mean that he was afraid of being alone with her and frightened that she might raise painful issues.

In her heart of hearts, W holds herself responsible for her father's death. She reports that her mother tried to reassure her when W recently confessed to her that she felt she was to blame for his death, but despite her mother's reassurance W still feels guilty. Crying quietly, W acknowledges that she may not sound rational but, nevertheless, she suspects her father's heart attack was brought on by all the pain and humiliation which he was unable to share and which he kept within himself. She genuinely wanted him to have a chance to face how he had betrayed

her and try to put the worst of it behind him and she repeatedly urged him to seek counselling. Her father promised he would, but failed to keep his promise and W senses that this left him feeling even more ashamed and distanced from her. Sadly aware of his withdrawal and inability to seek help, W wondered if she should press him further, but, at the same time, she felt she had done what she could by refusing to carry their secret any longer and by offering him the chance to redeem himself. Besides, she no longer had the heart to keep pressuring him. She felt she had suffered enough and needed to get on with her own life. In deciding to let go of her hope for her father's redemption, W faced that she was essentially letting go of her relationship with him. This was very painful for her and left her feeling racked with guilt when he died.

Since entering counselling, W has been able to derive some satisfaction from the awareness that she is unlike her parents and her brothers in that she can be revealing of her feelings, is not afraid to express strong opinions, and has had the courage to break the silence about her abuse. When she was growing up, W was labelled the "trouble maker" in her family - the one who brought up issues which her parents felt should not be mentioned. It made her miserable that they constantly told her to be quiet and she suspected they feared her honesty and frankness. In a household where certain topics of conversation were forbidden, and where her parents were suspicious of others and secretive about their feelings, W felt like an outsider. Like her parents,

she has had problems trusting others, but W believes that her problems with trust stem from the fact that she was sexually abused as a child.

Reflecting upon how she feels about herself in her relationship with her husband, W owns that she does not like the way she habitually pushes H away by becoming enraged with him. This is most likely to happen when she is feeling stressed, unwell, or physically vulnerable, as in her recent long bout of despondency. In trying to understand why she behaves this way, W has begun to see that her irritability and angry outbursts are often a cover for her immense fearfulness. It terrifies her to experience herself as powerless or out of control and this is essentially how she has felt for the past year and a half. She has grimly struggled to maintain a semblance of control and fulfil all her domestic responsibilities. But in her weakened state, she has frequently felt overwhelmed by all the demands on her. Instead of turning to H for support when she felt she was going under, W would typically lose her temper and push him away from her. She knows how hard this has been for H. He has tried to improve matters by helping her learn to read her own warning signs and reminding her to take time away to restore herself before she becomes overwhelmed and enraged.

As a younger woman, W would ignore or discount messages from her body when she felt despondent. Instead she, W would try to analyze her feelings, searching for psychological explanations, and pursuing active solutions. This approach often helped her



recover her equanimity and control. Now she sees that instead of exhausting herself by analyzing her life and searching for psychological explanations it might be better just to accept that there will inevitably be times when life is lived as embodied pain and exhaustion. Recently, she has found that when she stops struggling to stay strong and just accepts the fact that she is feeling dejected, or ill, or exhausted, she is less likely to feel terrified about events being out of her control. Nevertheless, feelings of yielding and acceptance are still unfamiliar for W who truly values how her fierce fighting spirit has enabled her to keep going throughout her long hard struggle to heal from sexual abuse.

Reflecting on how she would like to see H change, W reveals that she wishes he were more emotionally expressive. When they were first together, H would never tell her when she did something that upset him. It seemed to her that he kept his feelings inside and, in her words, "let them fester". She experienced his accumulated resentments as seeping out in indirect ways. For example, he would emotionally distance himself from her, which she found very distressing. She feared that unless H could be more open and direct with her, their relationship would not survive. W feels H has improved somewhat since she confronted him about this, but she still experiences him as holding back from expressing strong emotions and she finds this particularly regrettable during love-making. As she thinks about this, it occurs to her that H may be so focussed on

ensuring her sexual pleasure that he may not give full rein to his own passion. Ironically, it was H who first pointed out to her that she only knew how to participate in the sexual passion of another. W now speculates about whether H may also fear being fully open and vulnerable to his own sexual experience. This insight clarifies for her how they may both have contributed to the dampening of their passion and intimate closeness.

Further exploring the theme of emotional closeness, W expounds on how she and H share very similar ideas, values and beliefs. She feels closest to him when they have relaxed time to talk together, for instance, on holiday or when they are conversing over a leisurely dinner in a restaurant. It is after times of shared dialogue and closeness like these that she finds herself more interested in making love with H. W raises the possibility that in order for them to experience intense mutual passion during love-making, it may first be necessary for her to feel emotionally close to H.

Reflecting upon her struggle to heal, W feels she has personally benefitted by having to face the crisis of her sexual abuse. W's lived experience has led her to believe that personal and interpersonal crises are the catalyst for human growth and transformation and that people only change when they are forced to do so by the exigencies of their lives. In her words, "Sometimes it is only when you really fall apart that you can come back together in a different form." Despite the pain experienced during her two years in counselling, where she cried

in every session, she felt compelled to struggle on, intuitively trusting she would prevail. She prides herself on not avoiding painful issues and believes her unflinching persistence has helped her heal many of the wounds from the past, so that she can move forward. When asked, W says she doubts whether H would agree with her that their intimate relationship may have benefitted in an indirect way from the fact that she has had to struggle to heal from the sexual abuse. However, she feels that he might acknowledge the relation between suffering and transformation if he recalls how he himself changed through a traumatic experience when he was a young man.

It is a huge relief to W that she is no longer living the abuse as intensely as she did during her years in therapy. Her suffering has gradually lessened and she is gratified by the progress she has made in her healing. Comparing their relationship to others, she feels that the problems she and H are having are not dissimilar from those encountered by many young couples with small children, and this helps her feel "less damaged". As she contemplates the future, she has the feeling that the traces of her abusive past may fade to the point where she hardly notices them. Nevertheless, she knows that her painful past can never be fully erased and in her words, "there will always be a grain there".

Lately W has been reflecting upon her extreme fearfulness. The awareness that her life-world is pervaded by fear has become increasingly apparent to her through the course of these research

interviews. W is now wondering whether she was a fearful child even before she was abused. She describes her parents as apprehensive people, particularly her father, whom she perceived as a very anxious man. She recalls how, throughout her childhood, she lacked that unquestioning trust and confidence in her parents which, it seems to her, most young children experience. She felt she could not rely on her parents to take calm and sensible action in difficult or dangerous situations. In her enduring efforts not to over-emphasize the impact of being sexually abused, W questions the extent to which her profound fearfulness and lack of trust can be attributed to having been violated by her father, feeling emotionally abandoned by her mother, or to her own constitutional disposition.

W reveals that her most profound fear is the fear of being abandoned, which means to her, having to face utter aloneness. Recently, a homeopath suggested that her son has an inborn sensitivity to abandonment and W began to wonder whether this might also be true of her. Shortly afterwards, W had a dream in which she was complaining out loud that she had no real friends to support her, but also arguing with herself that this was not true and that she did, in fact, have good and reliable friends. Upon waking, she had the sense that the dream gave expression to her lived fear that, ultimately, there is no one in the world she can truly rely on to be there for her. Rationally, she knows that this is not the case but in the essential core of herself she feels abandoned and alone.

Elaborating further upon this theme, W seeks to express the nature of the excessive fearfulness evoked in her whenever she feels unwell, despondent, or not in control. In her dialogue with R, W begins to see that in these situations, she may feel utterly alone and with no one to rely on but herself. Sounding excited by this new awareness, W cries out, "Yes, that's it" and recalls, in the light of this, that H has often complained that she does not rely on him enough and is too quick to assume that she has to take care of everything herself.

W reflects upon how it might have been different for her if, while healing from the sexual abuse, she had not been in this intimate relationship with H. Looking back, W feels that there was a limit to how much healing she could have done on her own or with her therapist. She is convinced that the deepest healing can only take place within an intimate relationship, because only between two intimates can one's fundamental fears and least desirable ways of being be revealed. She contends that living relationally is possibly more difficult than living alone. However, with an intimate other, it is less easy to deceive oneself that personal problems have been resolved, when really they may just be hidden away or lying dormant. W expresses her appreciation for the way H has supported her through her healing and helped her to struggle with issues of trust. Finally, she reiterates how much she cherishes the fact that he was the first person ever to tell her, "I don't want you to be anything other than yourself". She felt liberated when he said this, but also

fearful, realising that it meant she no longer had an excuse not to face her true self.

Combined Situated Structure of Written Protocol and Interview  
with Husband of Couple No.1

For H, living with a survivor of childhood sexual abuse has meant sharing his wife's life-world which he feels is permeated by fearfulness and mistrust. In their intimate relationship, H experiences the ramifications of her sexual abuse insidiously in a way no specific incident could fully elucidate. W's lack of trust reveals itself in her need to be in control of decision-making, her fear of having to rely on him, and her emotional outbursts if she perceives that he has made a wrong decision. He senses that W lives each day as someone who has been fundamentally betrayed and who implicitly expects to be betrayed again.

H has observed that his wife's fearfulness is intensified in situations where she feels in some way dependent upon him and that she quickly becomes uneasy whenever she does not have full control in decision-making. In addition, H has noticed that W is often disconcerted by any divergence from what is known and familiar to her. For example, if he is driving and she is a passenger she always wants him to take the familiar route when they go anywhere. If he is feeling adventurous and wants to try a new route, W becomes angry and demands that he not do this. Likewise, it is very important to her that they always maintain a substantial cushion of savings in the bank. If they dip into

this, she becomes agitated and criticises his management of their finances, telling him he does not know what he is doing and she does not trust him. Even minor oversights, like forgetting to bring home something from the grocery store can evoke an emotional outburst and a reproach like, "It just proves I shouldn't have trust in you". It seems, to H, that W is searching for evidence to confirm her belief that there is no one in the world that she can truly rely on.

In H's opinion, they have been having relational problems since their first child was born. Their son was a very demanding baby and H was aware of how tense and anxious W seemed to be when handling him. It seemed to him that W was behaving in an extremely "dominating" manner - insisting that they do everything her way. He grieves that he was not able to be as closely involved with his son as he would have liked because, in his view, W wanted to have their baby all to herself. However, as if not wanting to acknowledge how excluded he felt, H contends that he did not feel resentful toward W because he accepted that, through breast-feeding, it was natural she would be enjoined in a closer and more intimate bond with their baby than he could be. Looking back on this time, H infers that W's need to be in control emanates from her fearfulness. He reports that through her therapy, W has learned that women who were sexually abused in childhood often feel overly protective and possessive of their children. He finds that W has been more relaxed with their second baby.

Their son was not yet two when W became pregnant again. This second pregnancy was a problematic one and H found W extremely difficult to get along with. He felt W was trying to control him to an unreasonable extent. Over the years, H has become aware that W tends to have a greater need to be in control when she is feeling stressed or overwhelmed, as she was during her second pregnancy and the ensuing year or so. He maintains he is more than willing to assume his fair share of the domestic and child-rearing responsibilities, but feels irritated when he experiences that W is trying to impose her own priorities and specific time schedules upon him.

Upon reflection, H feels W's apparent need to have control over most aspects of child-rearing no longer seems so pronounced to him. They still hold different opinions on child-rearing issues but now more frequently try to resolve their differences through discussion and compromise. For example, when the children stir at night, W who is a light sleeper, goes to them as soon as she hears a sound, in contrast to H, who sleeps more deeply and rarely wakes when they cry. H has suggested to W that, if left awhile, the children might go back to sleep by themselves and good sleep habits would ultimately benefit the whole family. At the same time, H appreciates that W's quick responsiveness to their stirring probably helps them feel secure. They have agreed that while the children are so young W will continue to go to them whenever they cry at night.



H believes that W's extreme need for security, her lack of trust, and her reluctance to depend on anyone, are directly related to her history of sexual abuse. However, he also considers that her family upbringing contributed to the wariness with which she approaches new people. For example, H feels W must have found it confusing that her father presented himself in public in a radically different manner from the way he behaved at home. H considers that W's tendency to question the authenticity of others may have originated in the fact that she grew up witnessing her own father's duplicity. In H's view, W often misreads social situations and suspects danger or deception where there is none. She has a tendency to focus on one comment she perceives to be negative and disregard the rest of the conversation. H considers himself to be much more open than W, in his readiness to accept recent acquaintances and his willingness to embark upon new friendships.

H describes what it feels like to be repeatedly confronted by W's expressed mistrust of him. He often finds it hard to comprehend how a comparatively trivial issue can suddenly explode into a huge crisis. When this happens, H experiences their life-world shrinking and being taken over by this new focal event. Starting with some act or omission of his which W misconstrues, H feels how he is being pulled into a "downward spiral" and swept into the maelstrom of her fury. He has learned that one way to avoid this is for him to quickly apologise, but he acknowledges that he does not always do this. In his view, W expects him to

admit his error, make a full apology, and acknowledge that her perspective on his behaviour is the correct one. If he fails to comply, they whirl once more into the vortex of another interminable debate until one of them calls a halt.

Over the years, H has come to see that these emotional storms are related to the fact that W lives so fearfully and finds it so hard to trust another person. He realizes that he often fails to see W's perspective on issues but, from his own point of view, she blows matters out of proportion and he suspects her angry confrontations are willful. He experiences their altercations as contributing to an increase in mutual animosity which fuels unspoken resentments toward each other. There are times when he calls W "the merciless lady" because even an apology will not always satisfy her, or she may accept his apology but then attack him for not having given it sooner. He tells her she is like a dog jealously guarding an old bone; there is no meat left on it but she goes on growling and chewing on it anyway. Fortunately, W's angry outbursts no longer occur with such frequency. H contends that he has been making more of an effort to see W's point of view and to apologize for his mistakes. But he also feels it is only human to make mistakes and confesses that he sometimes resents the way W berates him for a small error, or because she fears some oversight of his could have catastrophic consequences. He wishes W would focus less intensely on his errors and sometimes just overlook or forgive them.

H is convinced that sexual intimacy is singularly problematic for anyone who, like W, has been sexually abused. In his perception, this is because the essence of love-making is intense closeness which is inevitably reminiscent of her abuse and the embodied fears which this engendered. When they make love, H feels he is entering the very core of his wife's intimate being and he feels that this is the place where he comes face to face with the pain of her past abuse.

H maintains that W's lived fearfulness and need to be in control has had a restricting effect upon their sexual relationship as he experiences it. He reflects that their sexual life together has been very different from how he initially anticipated it would be. His first impression of W was that she was "a wild woman", whereas she at first viewed him as gentle and "mild". He was, therefore, extremely surprised to find that his first impressions changed dramatically when they began to make love. H regards himself as sexually adventurous, but, in his opinion, W prefers predictability in their sexual relationship and resists any departure from their routine way of making love. For instance, in his words, W would find the idea of making love in the living room "totally scary. I mean totally ... unacceptable". He thinks he is teasing her when he tells her that embarking on love-making with her is rather like negotiating a legal contract, where everything has to be spelled out and agreed upon.

H yearns for more variety and excitement in their love-making and hopes that a freer and more spontaneous sex life will be possible in due course. However, he considers he presently has little choice but to shelve his own wishes and behave in a thoroughly safe, transparent and predictable manner in contrast to the men who abused her. He appreciates that in order for old terrors not to be triggered, W needs to feel in control of what happens between them sexually and so he experiences himself as waiting for her to take the initiative and limiting his actions to ensuring conditions which are conducive to their love-making. H acknowledges how hard it is for him to live a restricted sex life, and how he tries to reduce the tension between them by using humour. Sometimes, however, what he calls "clowning" backfires and creates alarm in W. To illustrate this, H described what happened recently when he pretended to be very excited that this week's "ten minute window" (for possible sexual intimacy between them) had arrived. Apparently, W did not perceive his response to be playful, for instead of laughing she seemed startled and gave him a forbidding look that he interpreted to mean, "Don't even think about it".

H anticipates that their journey toward a mutually satisfying sex life will be long and difficult because of W's history of sexual abuse and he accepts that the first step is for her to trust that she will always be safe with him. However, when he recalls that W did not have a strong interest in love-making even before the children were born, he fears that sex may

continue to be relatively unimportant to her. He feels he has no sure way of knowing whether her limited interest in sex is related to the sexual abuse. By implication, therefore, he also does not know whether, as she heals, she will feel more desire for him or be willing to engage in a freer and more passionate sexual relationship. As yet, H has more questions than answers and experiences himself as having placed his own sexual needs, in his words, "a bit on hold".

H describes himself as utterly rejecting of stereotypically male ways of being. He feels an intense distaste for extreme expressions of masculinity and aggressive virility, considering himself to be more balanced for behaving in ways which many would consider to be more characteristic of women than men.

Elaborating upon this, H describes how when he was younger, he noticed that women often said they wanted to be with a man who was gentle, sweet-natured, and communicative, and he perceived himself to be like this. However, he observed that these same women tended to be sexually attracted to adventurous, unreliable, exciting men who were more stereotypically masculine in their behaviour. With an underlying note of bitterness in his voice, H describes feeling disillusioned about this and deciding that if this was what women found attractive, he would stay away from them. When he first met W, he felt dismissed by her as "mild" and therefore "probably boring". It was not until he confronted her in a conversation that he felt he caught her interest.

H feels that being sexually abused as a child "created a rupture" in W's life which prevented the emergence of a wholesome embodied self. In his view, W is harshly critical and self-deprecating about her appearance. She is also overly concerned about the opinions of others. He lives with her daily preoccupation and intense dislike of her own body and with her discontent about her clothes which she claims make her look ugly. H holds W's parents partially responsible for her lack of self confidence, having noted their judgmental attitudes and concern with external appearances. Since he and W have been together, H claims he has constantly urged W to rejoice in her own unique sense of herself and to behave and dress in a way that reflects this. But he feels his words have little impact on her and this frustrates and annoys him. He feels he can tell when W is particularly unhappy, by observing how she picks at her face in the mirror, as if punishing her body for her misery. Whenever she seems to be feeling unattractive and discontented with herself, H experiences her as irritable and rejecting of him. This is distressing for H and leaves him feeling excluded from intimacy and closeness with her. Not only does he frequently experience W as emotionally withdrawn from him, but he also feels that the atmosphere in their home suffers when she is feeling unattractive and ill-humored. Despite his efforts, H feels their shared relationship is infused with W's discontent and he often wishes their life together could be more joyful.

H tends not to dwell on the negative aspects of his life with W and generally reverts to a more optimistic or philosophical way of talking about their relationship. As if trying to shake off his despondency, H claims that it has been personally gratifying for him to be able to support W through her struggle to heal from the sexual abuse. He views this as a way of expressing his love for her. H recalls that it gave him great satisfaction to support her and bolster her courage when she faced difficult situations like confronting her father about the sexual abuse. H prides himself on being prepared to give W his honest opinion when he does not agree with her while, at the same time, championing her right to make her own decisions. He maintains that he urges her to involve herself in activities that she finds sustaining and encourages her to follow the path that she feels is best for her. In the past few months it has heartened him to see W becoming more confident, for example, in defining her own style and in buying clothes for herself. He has the sense that W's natural ability to delight in and freely express her emerging sense of self was curtailed when she was a child. It seems to him that she will first have to break free of her tendency to see herself through her parents critical eyes before she can transform her distorted sense of self and, in his words, "come into her own".

H describes their relationship as one which is based on mutuality and equality. He feels they both work hard to ensure they do their fair share in caring for their children and

maintaining their home, and that they also respect and foster each other's personal growth and professional ambitions. Lately, H has begun to ask himself whether he has placed too much emphasis on the importance of passion and sexuality in their intimate relationship. He questions if perhaps the love, mutuality, and emotional closeness which he perceives he and W already share should be enough for him and realizes that he needs to address this issue further.

H owns there have been times when he has had to struggle to maintain an optimistic view of their life together. He admits that he has found it extremely difficult to live with all the turmoil from W's abusive past and sometimes asks himself, "Is it worth it?". In not finishing his next question, "Would it be simpler to decide to ...? H implies that he sometimes feels tempted to give up on this painful relationship. Looking very sad, H struggles to recover his equanimity and, in a steadier voice, reflects philosophically that the decision to live as a couple always requires living with the other's history. However, H thinks this is probably harder when one partner has been abused and he personally considers that many of the problems which he and W are presently experiencing have their origin in W's abuse.

Reflecting further on the question, "Is it worth it?", H affirms that he has chosen to live in an intimate relationship with W and has consciously committed himself to sharing the psychological burden she carries in the hope of lightening it. He feels he has the strength for this task, but confesses sadly



that he sometimes feels oppressed. At times, he wonders whether the benefits of being in this relationship are worth it for the extra load he has to carry. With tears in his eyes, H owns that there are times when he feels very despondent. He gives a concrete example of a time when he approached W to make love and she flatly rejected him. Noticing he seemed crestfallen, she said in what he experienced as a condescending voice, "Oh, did I hurt your poor little feelings?". Much later, and after she apologised, H was able to interpret to himself that her cutting remark was, "like an abused person becoming abusive", intuitively sensing that W had probably been subjected to verbal cruelty by those who abused her.

H owns that being in this intimate relationship has taken its toll on him. About six months ago, W asked him how long he would be able to stay in their relationship if the situation became, as she put it, "really bad between us". At that time, H decided that two years would be long enough for them to know whether their relationship was going downhill or growing stronger. Now that their daughter is fifteen months old, H feels reassured that things are beginning to improve between them. He appreciates the fact that W is a good mother and a supportive partner who gives him a lot of freedom and encouragement to grow. At this time, H feels he is waiting to see if W can become less controlling and more trusting of him and whether she will seek more intimate closeness with him, both in their shared time together and in their sexual relationship. However, he

acknowledges W's perspective, which is that he cannot just rely on her to make this happen. H realizes that he also needs to become more actively creative himself, in seeking ways to revitalise their intimate relationship.

Reflecting on how he has changed through living with W, H sees himself as being more direct about confronting relational difficulties in order to resolve problems. This is new for him, because in his family he learned that the way to prevent conflict was to consciously avoid addressing differences. W has helped him appreciate how imperative it is that they openly discuss their feelings about their relationship and address problems before they worsen to the point of serious rupture. Through being with W, whom he admires for her efforts to create the life-world she wants for herself, H feels he is learning to be more actively engaged and assertive.

Asked what advice he might give to a man contemplating becoming involved with a sexual abuse survivor, H sighs and hesitates before replying. From his own experience, he feels an outsider could have no idea of the complexities involved in living with the extreme aftermath of sexual abuse. Switching to a more positive tone, H remarks that living with a woman who is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse can also enable the partner to rapidly gain in maturity and learn a great deal about intimate relationships. In H's view, partners need to be emotionally mature in order to endure the difficulties which inevitably arise in the early stages of the relationship. In addition, this kind

of relationship requires that partners play "the support role". H suggests that the partner would have to be able to live with significant restrictions to his own freedom of choice and accept that he would frequently have to compromise. If he were to pursue his own desires too strongly, he might be perceived as abusive. In H's opinion, the only choice for a partner is to be a conciliator and compromiser and, in his experience, this requires "a great deal of will power". H feels the partner would need to be aware that the area of sexuality is likely to be more sensitive and fraught with difficulties than with a woman who has not been sexually abused. H also feels that the couple needs to appreciate "the higher purpose" of relational living, in order to counteract being sucked into destructive patterns of relating to each other.

H intuitively feels that, as adults, those who have suffered and survived childhood abuse may become unusually capable of caring for and empathizing with others. He has experienced this with W in the way she cared for him during a recent brief illness. H appreciates that W is very easy to confide in, and that she listens and makes an effort to understand what is important to him. Concerned that he may have over-stated the negative aspects of their relationship, H concludes by saying that he wants to emphasize that he and W have created a mutually supportive way of being together in which they give and receive both care and understanding. H feels he and W share a wish to create a more enlivening intimacy between them and to pursue a more joyful way

of living. He expresses the hope that, together, they will be able to co-create the kind of intimate relationship they both desire.

Situated Structure of Joint Interview with Couple No.2

When they first met, W intuitively sensed that H was genuine and she felt unusually safe and comfortable with him. His gentleness was of the utmost importance to her and she valued that they could talk together as friends. H recalls being struck by the immediate mutuality of their feelings and sensed that, in W, he had found the honest and forthright friend for whom he had been searching. In his view, their similar background and "philosophy of life" enabled them to quickly understand each other. From the start, he felt that being with W was like coming into the home of a friend he had known for a long time and he found that talking with her restored his sense of well-being. He also appreciated that W laughed at his jokes and that they enjoyed just being together.

W and H did not fully realize how disastrous their previous marital relationships had been until they came to know each other. H admits that as a young man, he was not looking for a soul-mate but was attracted to women by their looks, and entered his first marriage primarily seeking sex and romance. W describes herself, prior to her first marriage, as "flighty" and needing full control over her partner. She lived life very much on the surface and viewed herself as tough, uncompromising and judgmental. She saw men as readily available and, therefore,

dispensable. She did not commit herself to anyone, demanded a great deal, and rejected those whose behaviour she found unacceptable. Despite this view of herself as tough and in control, her first marriage belied this. W felt demeaned and abused by her husband and, for years, she battled unsuccessfully to prove her worth to him.

Had she not met H, W fears she might have fallen into another destructive relationship. But H does not believe either of them would have made the same mistakes again, contending they had come to want a better life for themselves and for each other. In his view, their previous experience had led to a clearer sense of what they wanted from a partner and a willingness to commit themselves to working on a relationship. At the same time, they had higher standards for each other than for their previous partners. At first, they tested each other repeatedly, finding it hard to believe that this new ease in being together could be real. In H's view, their relationship, and W herself, felt "too good to be true". W agrees that they were awed at how quickly they felt they belonged together.

W had no problems being sexually intimate with H until she had been with him for several months. Suddenly, vivid re-experiences of being sexually abused as a child started to interfere with their love-making. What she was re-living made no sense to W and she thought she must be imagining these events, or precipitating them in some way. She did not know what to say to H or how to ask for help. All she could do was push him away and

hope the next time they made love, she would not be catapulted back into living the abuse again.

To W, it felt highly risky to tell H what was happening to her. However, afraid that their relationship might be blighted if she kept these occurrences a secret, she found the courage to confide in him. H had been aware that W's previous husband was abusive to her but had no idea that she had been sexually abused as a child. He was shocked to hear what had been done to W and astonished that the childhood abuse could erupt into her adult life-world in this way. Empathically, he imagined her anguish and was painfully reminded of occasions in his own childhood when he felt helpless, vulnerable, and angry in the face of ill-treatment. Even though her story sounded far-fetched to him, H felt respect for her torment and tried to be understanding. W concurs that she herself felt disbelief at the time. She has always appreciated the fact that, although others discounted her, H always trusted the validity of her experience.

Together they weathered the storms until the "flashbacks" virtually stopped intruding into their love-making. H recalls that what helped him get through this difficult time was that W kept him in touch with how she was feeling and repeatedly told him that he was not responsible for her adverse reactions during love-making. W, for her part, did not feel she rejected H as a person, yet somehow in re-experiencing her abuse, his maleness evoked her father and simultaneously her abhorrence. All she could do was endlessly repeat, "It's not you. It's not you".

Realising that her revulsion was not intended for him personally, helped H be supportive of her.

W was willing to marry H from early on in their relationship. She understood, from what H had told her, that he was happy to share his life with her and recognized that having a child and a home together implied commitment. However, having failed in his previous marriage, he was reluctant to remarry. She respected his need for certainty, but worried that his continued reluctance to marry her might mean his commitment to her was not a true one. W felt insecure both for herself and for the future of their child, considering it to be too easy to leave a relationship if one is not married. Ultimately, W resolved to challenge H to decide one way or the other. When H decided he did want to marry her she felt a huge sense of relief, believing that a formal tie would benefit all of them.

The couple experienced their simple wedding as intimate, romantic, and expressive of their distinctive way of being together. H confesses that the ceremony evoked in him a deeper feeling of commitment to their relationship, contrary to his prior conviction that it would not change the status quo. But this was not a surprise to W who always believed that once H took this symbolic step, his commitment would be genuine and one she could rely on. Since their marriage, W's doubts and insecurities connected with the sense that they could easily separate, have been dispelled. H, in turn, feels he reaps the benefits of W's increased happiness, which affirms his decision.

Presently however, W is experiencing a great deal of distress. About six months ago, H joined a men's group which meets on a weekly basis and a few months ago he spent a weekend away with this group. When he returned, H seemed charged with what W experienced as masculine bravado; in her words, he was "jumping around, thrilled, happy". He appeared different: unshaven, with a deep hoarse voice, and smelling of cigar smoke. Having previously only known and cherished H as a gentle, predictable and quiet man, W felt overwhelmed by the sudden change in him. In her fright, she likened him to an animal who might overpower her sexually, and she backed away from him. Her immediate fear was that H might try to dominate and control her sexually, as her first husband had done. In the days that followed, she distanced herself from him and tried to avoid situations that might lead to love-making. She was uneasy and fearful that he was changing in ways she did not understand and which would threaten her precarious sense of security.

W related a specific incident which exemplified, for her, H's changed way of relating to her. One night, shortly after he returned from the men's weekend, H told her to take off her night clothes before she came to bed, although he was aware that keeping her body covered was one way she protected herself from old fears. Previously, she had not felt afraid of being sexually intimate with H but, faced with this demand, she suddenly felt vulnerable and terrified. Blinded by her fear, W lost sight of H as her loving husband and he momentarily assumed the form of an



abuser. She knew that if he forced her to have sex with him, it would destroy their relationship. H challenged her in the name of trust and W argued with him, becoming increasingly angry and accusing him of being drunk. She could not understand why he would goad her like this. She felt she was being compelled to make herself entirely vulnerable at the very time that everything about his behaviour evoked her fear that he was going to abuse her as others had before.

W was brought face to face with the truth that she had only felt secure with H up until now because she had been in control of their sexual life. H had never challenged her like this before and she was torn between her desire to demonstrate her love for him, and her fierce determination not to be controlled by him. With profound reluctance, she complied with his demand. At the same time, she half-jokingly threatened to assault him if he dared to take advantage of her nakedness and actually hit him to make sure he understood. H then held and comforted her. All night W was uneasy, afraid that H might take advantage of her, but in the morning she awoke to realize he had not done so. Claspig his hands tightly together, H demonstrated how they clung to each other all night, adding that he too felt vulnerable but, at the same time, experienced this as their "closest night ever".

Reflecting on this incident, H reveals that he trusted himself to be entirely respectful of W. Nevertheless, since his weekend with the men's group, he had been experiencing a strong

personal need to have his wife obey him. His aim was to challenge her to accept that he, as a man, could be strong but still trustworthy. He also wanted the sensual pleasure of being naked together and the opportunity to show W that this could be pleasurable rather than frightening. He imagined that she would comply with his demand, but when she became extremely upset and angry, he realized that he had made a mistake and would have to face the consequences. In W's view, H seemed to be unaware that he was barging into dangerous territory and did not realize that his demand would remind her of being sexually abused and thus evoke an intensely adverse response.

Prior to his weekend with the men's group, H, in W's opinion, would never have challenged her nor held his ground in the way he did. H agrees and admits that, when he asked W to remove her night clothes, he was engrossed in his own needs and oblivious of how his demand might terrify W. He remembers feeling full of bravado and almost welcoming it when W hit him. In retrospect, H feels he acted like "a bull in a china shop". He is grateful that they came through the crisis as well as they did, but he also feels he benefitted by once again proving his trustworthiness. In looking back, W claims she does not regret what happened either. Although she had previously experienced H's gentleness and understanding, she had never been sure that he, or indeed anyone, could face up to those strong feelings of fear and rage aroused in her when she felt she was about to be abused. She also learned that she had only trusted H to the

extent that she controlled their sexuality. H had never put any sexual pressure on her, which was why, W feels, she was so shocked and threatened by his demand. But he did not betray her and she now regards this event as a significant test of his trustworthiness.

When W became so very angry and upset on this occasion, H recognized a pattern with which he has become familiar; one in which, from his point of view, the intensity of her feelings seems disproportionate to the precipitating incident. From previous disagreements, H has learned that when W becomes so angry that, "she's almost foaming at the mouth", a painful event from her past has been touched upon, of which she is totally unaware at the time. H has also learned that if he promptly disengages from the conflict and reaches out to hold W in a reassuring way, she usually yields and breaks down in tears. With her tears, comes the realization that the intensity of her rage is related, not so much to H as to herself, her past, her abuse, and her old fears. W affirms H's interpretation, contending that she sometimes has to go through this emotional ritual of rage and tears in order to uncover her true feelings.

W continues to find it difficult to tell H when she is feeling vulnerable or apprehensive. Instead, she resorts to what she calls her "strong forces" --irritability, criticism and anger --to disguise her vulnerability and fear. If H can get past her anger, then her real feelings can reveal themselves. H confirms that he must first "weather the storm" in order for crises to be

resolved between them. He recalls that, in the early tempestuous days of their relationship, this was hard for him because he would panic and react inappropriately so that, in his words, either "there would be two wackos yelling and screaming", or he would withdraw and sulk. Eventually, with W's help, he started to see that their relational conflicts usually follow a familiar pattern, like a sword fight in which both he and W get caught up in the movements of thrusting and parrying until H remembers to lower his weapon and step aside.

W appreciates H's ability to quickly recognize when they are starting to get drawn into a conflict of this nature because, in the heat of the moment, she is not always able to recognize this herself. W's previous husband used to tell her that her rages against him meant she was insane. He never saw the frightened and vulnerable woman hiding behind the enraged one. W is grateful to H for seeing what had previously been hidden from her own awareness and thus helping her to know more about herself. W and H reflect together that W used to have fewer, but very intense, outbursts in the first few years they were together. Presently, W feels her anger is closer to the surface and that her outbursts are more frequent but less intense.

With therapeutic help, W has been trying to accept that she cannot control everything and that she needs to become more flexible. Bearing this in mind, and recognising that her perennial need for organization is excessive, W decided to go along with H's more relaxed approach toward preparing themselves

for a recent family camping trip. However, by the third day of the trip, fearing they did not have the proper camping equipment to safely weather an approaching storm, W started to feel extremely insecure and desperate to go home. Because she did not trust H to make the appropriate decisions for the safety of the family, W felt she would be facing the impending thunderstorm all on her own. However, she was unable to admit this to H and her distress manifested itself in indirect ways. H interpreted W's anxious behaviour to mean that she was deriving some satisfaction out of worrying. But W countered that she felt compelled to take all the concerns for the family onto herself only because H was showing so little concern himself. This remark apparently infuriated H, who then insisted on driving them all home, with W crying and feeling ashamed that she was so distraught; while the children slept peacefully and H appeared to be unperturbed. To W, it seemed that H had behaved in an unusually heartless manner, and his high-handedness left her feeling demeaned. H, on the other hand, claimed that he felt pleased with himself for remaining calm and strong and doing what he thought was right for his family.

Currently, W and H are struggling with issues of control and each has a somewhat different view of their relationship. W owns she has always had a strong need to be in control and, until recently, H was an easy-going follower. She liked H the way he was before he became involved with the men's group, but his newfound sense of himself - as a man amongst men - has unsettled

and frightened her. She accepts that their relationship needs more balance but it is hard for her to let go of the reins when she still feels so fearful and vulnerable. This realization poses a dilemma for W. She would like a mature mutual relationship with H and does not want him to feel obliged to mute his sense of male sexuality and strength, yet she still lives with feeling "like a little china doll" who needs her vulnerability to be handled with delicacy and care at all times. H responds to W's description of herself in a gentle and empathic manner, sensing that she is implicitly referring to how, as a child, neither her vulnerability was respected nor her innocence treated with the delicacy and care it deserved.

Despite the fact that their relationship has become more stormy in the past few months, H feels optimistic about their future because he feels he now has a sense of direction. He compares working on their relationship with sailing in rough weather and, for him, this is both exhilarating and worthwhile. W does not share his enthusiasm, although she knows they have made progress in many areas. Nevertheless, the changes in H are hard for her to accept and she no longer feels as secure in their relationship. H admits that, although she has expressed her general support for growth and change, W had no say in how he was going to change and he feels she has been caught off guard. But W generously interjects that she encouraged him to join the men's group and would rather H felt free to explore and discover himself, even if this places their marriage at risk, than felt

trapped and stultified in their relationship.

Asked if they can imagine anything that might destroy their relationship, W ponders whether their love could survive the death of their child. Also, she fears that if H were to have an affair, it would irrevocably break her trust. H, however, claims if it were W who had the affair, he would be angry but not jealous and it would not destroy the relationship for him. H raises the possibility that they might fall out of love but this is not something he thinks about. Upon consideration, they refer to their many triumphs of survival and W ventures that their relationship could weather many assaults upon it, perhaps even the death of a child, as long as she and H maintained their respect for each other.

W feels she and H are absolutely determined to make their relationship work. In her view, their strength comes from their love for each other and their ability to resolve conflicts. When she approaches H to make peace, he is always ready for peace and tranquility to be restored. This is extremely important to her. W senses that because they are such good friends, she and H have been able to address the core issues of their relationship and grow within it. This was not possible for either of them in their previous relationships.

For H, the strength of their relationship derives from the special bond between them. He feels he understands what it means to be abused and believes, that having both suffered in childhood, they share a profound sympathy and caring for each

other. He also staunchly contends that there is a deep level of mutual trust between them. Acknowledging there are times when W questions whether she can trust him, H notes that she herself has wondered whether her problem with trust is, in her words, "a left over feeling from the past not having to do with him". H is convinced that if W ever had to decide, in an absolute sense, whether she trusted him or not, she would realize that in fact she does. However, W implores H not to discount the serious loss of trust she has suffered in the face of the changes he wants for himself and stresses it is imperative to her that he understands her fears and not be dismissive of her feelings. In response to her urgent plea, H reassures her that if they can surmount these enormous challenges, their relationship will have a depth rarely attained. W, on a more hopeful note, concurs that they have, once again, chosen to struggle through a relational crisis together rather than giving up and going their separate ways.

When R explores their expressed hopefulness, they confirm this and relate it to their ongoing striving for self-awareness and self-understanding. W has come to recognize that she has set desperately high standards for herself. She describes herself as someone who is extremely demanding of herself: working unceasingly to be a good wife and mother and striving for instant and complete success in her endeavors. She realizes, that she needs to stop putting so much pressure on herself because her health is being affected. W suffers from fibro-myalgia and high



blood pressure. She attributes this to her early sexual abuse, which continues to take its toll and seems to have left its legacy of pain locked into her bodily existence.

W believes that if she had stayed in her previous marriage, her past abuse would have remained buried. Being with H, gave her a safe haven where the memories could surface and where she could work through the lived aftermath of the abuse. H contends that when W finally found herself in a loving and supportive relationship, where she was no longer being abused, she was able to recognize that some of the problems she experienced in her relationships had their origins in her past. Ironically, H comments, W used the safe space provided by their relationship to gather her strength and project her anger onto him. W acknowledges that since the memories of her abuse began to surface, she and H have been living on an emotional roller coaster.

Asked to reflect on how their relationship might have been different if she had not been sexually abused, W speculates that they might have led superficial lives, concerned with improving their material rather than their personal and spiritual well-being. Instead, she feels they have grown substantially and in ways that would not have been possible without each other's help. Having experienced lives of abuse and hardship has given them a more profound appreciation of life and the satisfaction of the simple and the true. H remarks that he has come to classify people according to whether or not they have a special

sensitivity derived from being abused, or from suffering in other ways, and he regards those who lead rather superficial lives as being limited in empathy. He also raises the possibility that those whose lives seem easy may still have their hardships ahead of them, whereas, he and W will hopefully enjoy a well-earned and happy old age together.

W senses that she would have been a different person had she not been abused. She is aware that she thinks and acts in ways that are strikingly different from women who have not been abused and she often feels emotionally distant from them, assuming that they cannot possibly understand her life-world. H too reflects on his unhappy past. As a child, in his own troubled family, he created a rich imaginative life to escape to from the pain and bleakness of his daily existence. He feels that the personal qualities of inner strength and empathy, that W now admires in him, were earned the hard way during his painful childhood.

Because of his own suffering, H feels empathy for children and especially for his own. W, too, is convinced she is a more devoted mother than she might have been had she not suffered so much as a child. She claims, also, to be a mother who would not hesitate to ruin anyone who hurt her daughter. Strikingly, W does not have the same vengeful feelings toward her own abusive father and still continues to be conflicted and confused about how to act toward him. But she feels no doubt about how mercilessly she would deal with anyone who abused her daughter. W concludes by sadly wishing she could protect and take care of

herself as well as she does her daughter, but this is not the case.

Combined Situated Structure of Written Protocol and Interview  
with Wife of Couple No.2

Describing what it has been like for her to live in an intimate relationship as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, W reveals that, as an adult, she always felt apprehensive and uncomfortable in the presence of men. However, when she met H she sensed that he was different. There was nothing aggressively masculine or controlling about him. On the contrary, she found him gentle, caring, shy and with an appreciation for beauty which drew her to him. She experienced him as being the opposite of her father in personality and interests and believed this difference enabled her to feel at ease with him. His openness enabled her to feel safe and secure in a way she had not believed would be possible with a man and she felt she wanted to hold him and care for him. Never in her life had W experienced such intimacy in a relationship.

W described her father as a very dominating man, who showed little affection or approval toward his children. He expected everyone in the family to work constantly and follow his orders precisely. He was a small man who said very little, but managed to exact total obedience from his wife and children merely with a stern gesture or look. As a family they were isolated and his children were not allowed to have friends or any form of social life outside the family. W recalled with fury how he kicked her

once when she begged for a reprieve from the endless grind of work he expected from all his children. His brutality shocked her and, for a moment, she felt a murderous hatred for him. Occasionally, she recalled, her father would seem more relaxed and would give her one of his infrequent smiles to show he was pleased with her work. Unfortunately, it was also at these times, as W says, that "the trouble started" and her father would reveal his sexual interest in her. She still feels completely in the dark as to whether her father perceived her as a girl, a woman, or just a female, when he approached her sexually. Implicit is the sense of how conflictual her father's rare moments of approval must have been for W, coinciding as they did with him sexually abusing her.

W has continued to feel ambivalent about how to address, with her father, the issue of his sexual abuse of her. After all these years, she still experiences feelings of disgust and rage toward him and, if she could, she would unload onto him all the pain she has been carrying. However, she does not believe that venting her feelings on him would free her from her suffering. Recently, her father offered to do some work on their house and W reluctantly agreed, despite her ambivalence about maintaining contact with him. Having him spend the night under her roof was extremely difficult for W and left her feeling robbed of the reassuring sense of her home as her safe haven. Tearfully, she explicates her feeling of dread that the shadow of her father's presence has now invaded her home and she does not know how to

banish it. She feels herself to be dirty and contaminated and wishes she could expunge his presence by washing all the walls of the house, but she knows this would not be enough.

In the early days of her intimate relationship with H, W experienced that his caring manner liberated her from suppressing her feelings. Paradoxically however, in opening her heart to him, long-buried memories of being sexually abused were also freed to emerge. These "flashbacks" began erupting into her awareness when she and H would start to make love. In a moment, H would be replaced by the sensed presence of her father. Frightened and overwhelmed, W would open her eyes in the hopes that she could make her father's presence disappear and would feel compelled to push H away. At first, not knowing how to tell him what was happening, W was afraid to say anything to H, but she always sensed his empathy and caring and, over time, these intrusive episodes decreased in frequency.

Although working with their individual psychotherapists during the past few years has been beneficial, W feels she and H now need counselling as a couple because life is most difficult for them when feelings from her abusive past continue to be lived out in their present relationship. Only in the past year or so has W become aware of the multitude of everyday events which can trigger a re-experiencing of the sexual abuse she suffered as a child. For example, once when H shaved off his moustache, it precipitated an unexpected crisis for W who begged him to grow it again but could not tell him how his shaven face, touching hers,

felt like her father's. Sometimes she has been able to eliminate certain tangible reminders of her father by taking action like discarding all H's blue work shirts or asking him not to wear work boots around her. At other times, she finds simple manual tasks take much longer than necessary because she is repeatedly interrupted by painful memories associated with the crushing labour enforced upon her by her father when she was a child. W feels she has no choice but to wrestle with each new trigger as it emerges into her awareness.

W recalls that, as a young adult, others viewed her as a cheerful person, not realising how she had forced her suffering out of awareness to the extent that nobody, not even W herself, knew what anguish lay behind her smile. When she experienced intrusions of her abuse memories, she would sever her feelings from them. Walling off her true feelings helped her to survive, but in the past few years she has been struggling to heal from her abuse and this requires her to be aware and expressive of her feelings. In addition, W believes her previously repressed childhood anguish is now surfacing and expressing itself not only in emotional distress but also in bodily pain which is becoming more intense. Her hope is that, if she can resolve most of her sexual abuse issues, the pain trapped in her body will be released and her resources can be re-directed toward living her life more freely.

Assailed by her memories and feeling alone when H does not comprehend their power, W's days are exhausting. During the past

few years, W has often felt at a loss as to how to endure all the disorienting intrusions from her past which invade her life-world. She desperately wishes she could eradicate the experiences of her abusive childhood and live freely as a mature woman, but she does not believe this is possible.

W describes the birth of their daughter, after she and H had been together for nearly two years, as a radically transforming experience. In her words, all her illusions of being a tough parent, "went out of the window". Overwhelmed by the intensity of her love for her baby, W was freshly astounded that her own father could be so unloving and abusive toward his children. She vowed to keep her daughter safe from anyone who might harm her, knowing how being abused as a child affected her own life-world and powerfully distorted her way of being with others. For W, protecting and taking care of her child has given her life new meaning and significance. She not only enjoys being a mother but also feels she is recovering some of her own lost childhood through her daughter. She rarely had fun as a child and remembering this heightens her delight in watching her daughter at play. However, she also finds herself feeling deprived and envious at times, wishing she too could have enjoyed such careless freedom in childhood.

W reveals that her life has been painfully difficult for the past few years, but a recent event has placed an additional strain upon their relationship. A few months ago, H spent a weekend with a men's group he had joined shortly before. W feels

that since this time his attitude and behaviour have changed in a perplexing way that radically affects the nature of their relationship. When she married H, W thought she knew him. However, since the men's group weekend, W has experienced herself as living with a "new person", a stranger, a different man from the one she married. H is full of ideas about how men and women have different social roles to play, how men can never really understand women, and how women can only be counselled by other women. He has begun to urge W to go off and discuss her problems with her women friends, leaving her feeling pushed away by him. W strongly disagrees with these newly expressed ideas. She previously considered H to be progressive and psychologically well-informed about relationships between men and women. Now, hearing H declare, "I'm a man. I can't help you with that", she feels as if she has been abandoned by her best friend. W cannot get a grip on what H means, when he tries to convey to her the ambiguous message that he is the same person yet different. In her words, it is like water running through her hands.

Tearfully, W reveals that she feels overwhelmed by what she considers to be a crisis in their relationship. She feels an urgent need to address and clarify with H how his changed behaviour has distressed and frightened her. She is aware that she is presently suppressing her true emotions, and knows from experience that this is unwise. However, before confronting H, she wants to be clear about her own feelings. She senses she will have to approach him with care, but at the same time,



resents having to tread cautiously when she is feeling so vulnerable herself. In addition, perceiving H to be acting strangely, W has some concern about whether he is currently solid enough to be able to work through relational difficulties.

W blames H's ongoing involvement with the men's group for the changes she sees in him. She feels he has gone overboard in his determination to tell her nothing about this experience and is filled with trepidation when H responds to her questions with statements like, "Wait and you'll see". While respecting that H needs to honour confidentiality, she finds his secrecy offensive. Since childhood, she has abhorred secrets and deception. Fearful and insecure, she used to wish she could read people's minds so as to be forewarned of their true thoughts and intentions. Prior to the men's weekend, W felt she and H were growing closer in the mutuality of their shared revelations, but now it seems as if "nothing is coming back" from H - their dialogue has stopped cold.

W suspects H of making a deliberate choice to exclude her from his newfound private world, not because he does not trust her or because total secrecy is mandated by the group, but because he is emotionally closing himself off from her so as to create a separate world for himself. This evokes her anger as she feels it to be unfair to her and a betrayal of their relationship. Quick to feel she is somehow to blame for his apparent defection, W fears H may be weary of struggling to understand and support her and may want to relinquish this

burden. W feels this would make for a dramatic turning away from the mutuality of their shared life, which W has treasured so much. Nevertheless, despite the fact that she is fearful for their future right now, W honors H's desire to understand himself better and contends that if only he would take her into his confidence, she could learn to accept his desire for more personal time and space.

Since the weekend and H's ongoing involvement with his men's group, W feels she has lost that all-embracing sense of security which she experienced when they were first together and which enabled her to share her past with him. H tells her she can trust him, but he also seems to want to limit the extent of his availability to respond to her needs. He has told her she will be able to count on him "most of the time" and this qualified response leaves W feeling insecure - wondering what new limits he may have set for himself and whether she will be able to turn to him whenever she needs to. She understands that it makes sense for them to sometimes put contentious matters on hold until the time is right for a discussion, but when she urgently needs to talk to H about an issue relating to her sexual abuse, she has already waited and carefully chosen the time, knowing how emotionally draining this will be for her. It frightens her that H might no longer be there for her when she needs him most and, sensing a breach between them which was not there before, she has been afraid to test this.

The issue of trust has been much bandied between them since H's return from the men's weekend. Over the years, W has learned that there are many ways in which she can trust H. However, in her view, he has always had too casual an attitude toward domestic and personal responsibilities which W considers to be vital aspects of a person's overall trustworthiness. In particular, when left to take care of the children, he is not as vigilant as W would like him to be (e.g. he may fall asleep when he is supposed to be watching their toddler). There are times when W wonders whether she is overly vigilant and protective of her daughter. She is aware that her efforts to ensure her daughter's safety and well-being at all times may appear extreme and unrealistic to others. She feels she and H may represent opposites, with her being overly responsible and H not responsible enough. But, be that as it may be, what she regards as H's negligence, leaves W feeling insecure. Her trust in H has been severely shaken of late and this has heightened her apprehension about whether she can trust him to take adequate care of their daughter when she is not there. She feels resentful about not being able to rely on H in this respect.

W gives a detailed description of an event which illustrates both her growing fear, that H may start trying to dominate her, and her perception of him as not responsible enough to be trusted with safety decisions for the family. Recently the family went on a camping trip, with W suppressing her anxious reservations about the adequacy of H's preparations and planning. By the

third day, with a thunder storm approaching, W felt she could no longer tolerate leaving H in charge of familial decisions. She did not know how to tell him that she thought they should go home and, instead, tried to influence him indirectly by suggesting other reasons for leaving. But H showed no concern about the impending storm nor about her anxiety and, instead, appeared to be calmly enjoying himself. When he inquired why she seemed so intent on worrying instead of enjoying their camping trip, W defensively retorted that by not showing proper concern for the safety of the family, he was putting all the familial responsibility on her shoulders. At this point, all discussion between them ceased. H declared his pleasure in their trip had been destroyed, and he demanded W specify what she wanted him to do. H's behaviour felt totally unfamiliar to W, who was used to his gentle and affectionate way of helping her reveal her true concerns. She sensed he was angry and implored him to discuss matters with her so that they could reach a consensual decision. But H refused, seemingly unmoved. Frustrated and furious, W hid behind a tree, hitting at it and sobbing. At last, she admitted to him that she wanted to go home and H gave the order to leave, threatening to go without her if she did not hurry. Ruefully, W recalled how the children behaved quite appropriately while she, the adult, was taken home crying and distraught.

Affronted by his attitude, W later told H she preferred to discuss family decisions with him as a mutual partner. But H, unbudging as a rock, merely reiterated that he had done his duty.

He suggested W might feel some remorse about her own behaviour but, as far as he was concerned, he felt no resentment and the matter was closed. W recalls that, during this confrontation, H looked at her in a way that left her feeling diminished, as if she was a small disobedient child in the presence of a tall stern father. She took exception to this. H had, on previous occasions, refused to discuss an issue when she approached him in a confrontational manner, but even on those occasions, they eventually succeeded in understanding each other's point of view. However, this time, H remained non-communicative and distant, leaving W feeling isolated and very confused.

Reflecting further, W surmises that H's unusually stern and uncommunicative manner, may have reminded her of her father. Recalling how her father would silently control her mother's behaviour, also reminds W of a recent occasion where she unknowingly disturbed H's reading and he silenced her by putting his finger to his lips and giving her what she experienced as an angry threatening glare. With tears in her eyes, W reveals that she felt violently enraged by H ordering her to be quiet in this way and felt she could have "ripped off his head". Prior to the men's weekend, W feels H would have probably been helping her (e.g. in getting the children to bed) instead of relaxing by himself. W, sensing H's present reluctance to discuss issues with her, did not confront him about his behaviour on this occasion, nor try to resolve this moment of hostility between them. She doubts he is presently receptive enough for her to

tell him she does not want him to issue her with gestured commands as her father used to do. Despondently, W reflects on her temerity in broaching with H how his changed manner and behaviour have disconcerted and alarmed her.

W fears the balance in their relationship has shifted now that H has begun to assert himself in a way that has left her feeling diminished and more vulnerable. The prospect that H may try to take control of their relationship is unnerving for W but, in a way, she is also tired of feeling she has to be strong and steely all the time and yearns to express her softness and gentleness as a wife and mother. W wonders whether she learned her harshness from her own unforgiving father. She is aware that she constantly strives to convince others of how tough and uncompromising she is. Feelings of weakness and vulnerability are abhorrent to W, who fears that without her strong guard in place, she risks being flooded by her own uncontrollable emotions or violated by malevolent others. She fights to avoid feeling vulnerable, and mobilizes her anger to bolster up her strength, in the same way as she marshals it to try to keep intrusive memories of her sexual abuse at bay. However, H has uncovered her "secret" and has helped her to understand that she is not the tough person she pretends to be. As she heals from her sexual abuse and explores herself more fully, W realizes she will have to face living with her vulnerability, especially since she no longer has the strength and energy to maintain her facade of toughness.

Reflecting on the ways in which she feels she is different from women who were not sexually abused as children, W describes her life-world as permeated by fear and insecurity - fear of others, of imminent catastrophes, of the cold, of not being able to think clearly, of what might befall her daughter, of the ultimate untrustworthiness of men - and she attributes these fears to having witnessed and lived through so many horrible events. In her own words, W states "... it's very hard for me today to live my life as a secure life ..."

Lately, W has experienced a reassuring sense of commonality with a friend whose father also sexually abused her. Sensing this woman's desperate insecurity and watching her try to control everything around her, has made W more painfully aware that she too lives her life in a similar way. She weeps as she states, "The biggest issue in my life is security". W contends the only way she can presently feel secure is if she can maintain control of everyone and everything in her life-world. She is aware that this is not possible but, nevertheless, this is her constant striving and exhausting plight. Having been abused as a child means to W that she is mired in her past and has been denied the chance to be fully herself in the world. Poignantly she states, "I don't live freely".

Another way in which W feels she is different from women who have not been abused is that she feels overly responsible for everything she engages in - from being a wife and raising a child, to keeping the house tidy and balancing her checkbook.

Nothing short of perfection satisfies her and she torments herself with devastating fears of what will transpire if she fails to achieve perfection. Feeling depleted and enchained by the multitude of responsibilities she has assumed, W yearns to disentangle herself and learn how to balance her own needs with her desire to take care of her loved ones.

W feels she has worked hard to establish common ground with women who have not been abused and finds she can communicate with them on relatively safe topics like children and domestic life in general. Nevertheless, despite some commonalities, W senses that she lives in a way which radically sets her apart from them. In her perception, other women do not seem to live on an "emotional roller coaster" as she does. She also feels herself to be different from them in the way she lives an all-pervasive insecurity, needing to be fully in control at all times, feeling acutely distressed so much of the time, and anxiously anticipating possible catastrophes to which they seem oblivious. Ultimately, W has come to believe that no woman who has not been abused in childhood can really understand the awfulness of her life. In fact, there are times when W feels she would like to restrict her social world to women who can understand her because they have a similar history of abuse. But, she also does not want to feel defined by her sexual abuse and limited to only being with others who have been similarly violated. She yearns to be able to feel not marked but, in her words just a regular "part of society and all women".



To illustrate how having being abused has set her apart, W mentions that most of the women in the baby-sitting group she belongs to seem quite relaxed about having one of the local fathers join them. But the fact that these women are open to the idea of having a man take care of their children, merely demonstrates to W that they themselves have never been sexually abused. Although she castigates herself for perhaps being unfair, W does not want a man in the group. She intuitively feels he may be untrustworthy and is in a quandary about whether to inform the other women about her suspicions. Being an informer is problematic for W, who even though she was initially disbelieved, still feels guilty about revealing the secret that her father had abused her.

The fear and insecurity which have riddled W's existence are further intensified whenever men are nearby. Fear prohibits her from commonplace activities, like getting into an elevator with a strange man, and she is always on her guard in social situations, in case a man should make a sexual advance toward her. This would not only be extremely uncomfortable for W, but she would also assume that she was to blame for attracting attention to herself. When W is amongst other people, she is conscious of the need to defend and protect her whole body. She is constantly reminded of her womanhood, perceiving men to be looking at her breasts rather than at her face. This is very disturbing to her. She has heard other women complain of men acting this way, but feels they do not live the fear of violation as she does.

Fundamentally, W wishes the men she meets would keep to themselves and leave her alone for she continues to hold the painful conviction that there will always be amongst them those who are prepared to wantonly violate others. Moreover, this is a state of affairs over which she has no control.

W considers being sexually abused as a child radically altered her perspective on men and her ability to feel safe in their presence. She suspects that, had she been violated by a stranger this would still have had a serious impact, but nothing like the impact of being violated by her own father. W believes that at the core of all her problems lies her father's betrayal of her trust in him. Being betrayed in this way led her to believe that if her own father could abuse her, any other man might also feel entitled to do so. W realized her father was not unique when she learned from a friend that she too had a father who abused her. At first this provided W with some relief and she felt less of a pariah. However, it did not take long for W to infer that if fathers could abuse their own daughters then, by implication, any man could be a sexual abuser. W had, then, to face the frightening realization that she was living in a world surrounded by men, with no certainty about which of them might be potential abusers.

Living as someone who had been betrayed and abused, W found that the only way she could keep herself safe was to trust and rely on her intuitions. In H, she felt she had finally found a man with whom she could feel secure. But since the men's

weekend, W has been questioning whether she might have been wrong in her intuitive sense that he was trustworthy. W is aware that, because H is a man, she has never been prepared to give him her complete trust. Holding back from fully trusting him has been her way of protecting herself against hurt and guarding against possible betrayal. W can never feel really safe around men because she fears their capacity to physically overpower women. Even though H has never used force against her, W is always aware that he is physically bigger and stronger than she is and, in addition, has been trained in the martial arts. Above all, he is a man, and W's ultimate fear is that no man can be entirely relied upon to control himself. If he were ever to "cross the line" and use force against her, W maintains this would annihilate her trust and destroy their relationship.

W reflects that she has given so much of herself to their mutual intimate relationship, that if H ever used physical force against her, she would feel personally destroyed. At present, W feels she is living so fearfully, that she wonders whether she should just take her precious daughter and leave home. She speculates that this might be easier for H too, given her sense of how tired he must be of perpetually having to reassure her and prove his trustworthiness. Wearily W concludes that although he may be claiming he is a stronger and "better" man since his weekend away, to her, H has changed in ways that fill her with trepidation and she fears their relationship may be heading for disaster.

Combined Situated Structure of Written Protocol and Interview  
with Husband of Couple No.2

Reflecting on what it has been like for him to be in an intimate relationship with a woman who is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, H describes it as "living on a roller coaster of emotions". Sometimes the pace and the extreme shifts of emotion can be exhilarating, but often he yearns for peace and tranquility. At times when they are both battling to fight off their own "personal demons", their relationship suffers and H despairs because their life together feels "too heavy, too sad, too negative". H has the sense that W's profound suffering relates to the irretrievable loss of a safe and nurturing childhood which she can never restore. H has found that any event which reminds W of her past abuse, such as being sexually intimate, becoming a parent, or even the mere fact that he is a man, can upset the balance of their lives and draw them both into her overwhelming sadness.

After she went into therapy a few years ago, W started to express her rage and fury. H feels she may really be angry at herself but it seems to him that she projects her rage outward and that he is often the target of it. Sometimes, when they are arguing, W will suddenly become so intensely irrational that an alarm bell goes off for H, warning him she has begun to re-live some interpersonal trauma from her abusive past. As soon as he realizes this, H stops arguing and does his best to calm and comfort her. W tends to feel extremely remorseful and in need of

reassurance after she realizes she has attacked H, when it is not really him she is angry with. According to H, conflicts engendered by W's past are now diminishing in frequency and intensity. Presently, fights are more likely to be sparked off when W senses, often correctly, that H is trying to dominate or control her.

Their life together has, in H's words, "been peppered" with crises. For example, giving birth to their daughter was, in his view, an overwhelming experience for W. Looking back on it, H feels W was unprepared for how motherhood would bring her face to face with her own perceived imperfections and weaknesses. Tense and volatile, she was barely able to keep going and H tried to carry the major burden of stress for both of them. Deprived of each other's customary support, it seemed to H they were caught in a vicious cycle, spiralling down into deeper levels of misery. H experienced his life-world as pervaded by tension and, under the combined weight of unresolved stress from his own life and this new burden, he broke down and was diagnosed as depressed. Since they have been together, H has suffered two periods of emotional "shut down" each lasting for about half a year. During these times H was too deeply troubled to be able to contribute to their relationship and W, although she tried to take care of everything, was unable to do so. Presently, both are receiving counselling. H is also on medication, which he feels is alleviating his mood, but nevertheless, it has been a slow and difficult recovery for him.

What H has called his "own personal hell" relates to growing up with a father who drank excessively, imposed his will on others, and used his fists to settle disagreements. Now that he himself is a father with vulnerable young children, H finds his father's behaviour even more incomprehensible and inexcusable. H suffered greatly as a child and believes that his inability to stand up to his father may have predisposed him, as an adult, to close off emotionally in the face of overwhelming stress. Having felt abused as a child, H is sensitive to W's abuse, which he regards as both similar and different from his own. He recalls the immediate empathy they felt for each other and the sense of being bound together by their shared understanding of their childhood pain. For H, the capacity and willingness to understand the other is fundamental to an intimate relationship.

Strikingly, H did not allude to his personal sufferings when the couple were interviewed together. H confirms that until recently he has tended to focus more on W than on himself and that her issues have taken precedence in their relationship. Upon reflection, he recognizes that helping W was personally gratifying for him and served to divert him from indulging in self-pity. He believes he and W had a sense of how they complemented each other and this drew them together. Intuitively, he felt she needed a lot of support and he, in turn, enjoyed feeling useful and relished her appreciation when he cheered and comforted her. H recollects how, from an early age, his adoring mother taught him to be her psychological and

spiritual counselor and called him her "little Jesus". He became adept at listening, understanding, and caring for an emotionally needy woman and, when he met W, it felt familiar to be this way with her too.

In the early days of their relationship, H found being with W draining, for she seemed to have an insatiable craving for his care and attention. Presumably because she found safety and reassurance in his presence, W wanted to be with him constantly. After a while, being "crowded" in this way started to annoy him and he sensed that he would have to fight for his own personal space. However, although W would ostensibly agree to leave him alone for a while, she would soon be back, wanting closeness and terrified of being left on her own. H felt W was overly reliant upon him, looking to him to be her crutch and saviour. He was increasingly aware that he was fostering her reliance upon him by playing the "psychologist" - asking probing questions and making suggestions. However, after a while, H began to resent being called upon whenever W lacked confidence in herself and sensed that in responding to her appeals he was further undermining her own self-reliance. Constantly being called upon also left him with no time to restore himself and he felt that, as a couple, they needed personal as well as shared time and space.

Gradually, H has come to realize that he can no longer afford to play the "psychologist" in his relationship with W, having twice paid the heavy price of becoming overwhelmed and depressed. After what he perceives as a lifetime of caring for

others, H now feels he must take time for himself and find a way to counter-balance his understanding and nurturing side, even though he realizes this will present problems for W. Having been raised by a single mother and surrounded by women (or men who were inadequate) H feels he was deprived of a healthy masculine identification and thus finds it difficult to know himself as a man. He now feels compelled to assert his manhood and has embarked on a journey, through the men's group he has joined, to discover what it means to be "a real man".,

Recently, H spent a weekend away with the men in his group and returned rejoicing in his newfound maleness. Filled with bravado, and resolved to "be a man" in his relationship, H demanded, one night, that W remove her night clothes before she came to bed. When W balked at removing her clothes, H realized he had stumbled onto dangerous territory and the situation rapidly escalated into an emotional crisis. He wished, in one way, that he could retract his ill-chosen demand. But he also felt it was imperative not to capitulate in his first real attempt to assert his manliness. He wanted to convey to W that he could be as immovable and strong as a rock, even if he came across to her as obnoxious, and he believed, at the time, they would both benefit if he succeeded. He sensed they were embroiled in a battle for power and felt compelled to stand his ground and win the first round before admitting his transgression.



H has found that, in the wake of this crisis, W has been intensely pre-occupied with the issue of control and quickly becomes upset whenever she perceives that he is attempting to exercise power over her. Elaborating upon their current relational impasse, H explains that, for him, his new-found sense of being a "real man" involves "domination" over his wife in certain aspects of their life. He admits that "dominate" is a strong word but believes he is using it accurately to describe his perception of the sexual roles of men and women. In his opinion, the bodily differences between men and women have a determining influence over what role they should play in the family. Domination, to him, does not mean assuming a blanket authoritarian stance but rather selecting important issues on which to lay down the law. He insists he will not usurp W's rights to selfhood or try to seize all the power for himself.

These days, H feels like a "bull in a china shop" because, he is trying to be strong and in control - "a real man", while having to contend with W's desire for him to continue to be open, understanding, gentle and patient. He acknowledges that in starting to assert his manhood, he may behave in an extreme fashion and make mistakes. Being prepared to risk making a mistake is new for him since he has always regarded himself as too cautious and self-protective to assert himself and wanting to be more like a woman emotionally. He now believes this was a futile quest and vows that he is ready to learn to be a man the hard way, which includes taking his punishment if he errs. H

realizes he has complicated his marriage but at least feels he is no longer stagnating.

Initially, H did not appreciate how peculiarly difficult it would be for W if he began to assert his manhood. He perceives that their relationship is now more troubled than before because W no longer knows what to expect of him and fears he intends to dominate and control her. H owns he has been making authoritative pronouncements and insisting that they are not for discussion. He is aware that W finds this totally out of character and very confusing. H has noticed that when he speaks in a commanding tone, W panics, presumably thinking he is going to start behaving like the men who abused her in the past. The fact that he keeps secret from her the inner-workings of the men's group, makes the situation even more fraught for W. She fears he is becoming "macho", something she loathes and associates with abuse (although he has vowed he will never act abusively toward her). Nevertheless, given W's tendency to react explosively when she feels afraid or threatened, H senses that his secretive and strange behaviour is like a red rag to a bull.

H has reached the conclusion that what W professes to want from him is not necessarily what is best for her. He is aware she prefers him to be gentle, kind and nurturing but asserts that, instead, he intends to become a more rounded and "real person". By this he means he will be fully engaged in their relationship and ready for the challenge of both giving and receiving, in contrast to just catering to her expressed needs.

H claims his goal is to become stronger, in acts rather than words, for the sake of his marriage and his family. He now espouses the general view that partnership and democracy have not worked in the family and that fathers must re-assume the dominant leadership role. This path feels right for him and he is working hard to assert his manhood and to establish himself in his newly perceived role, despite the upset and conflict which this has stirred up. His family and home life are very precious to him and H declares that nothing would induce him to abandon his relationship with W. In his words, "she makes my life infinitely more challenging and rewarding".

Already, H feels optimistic that W has begun to adjust to the changes in their relationship and gives a concrete illustration of a time when he felt W responded to his challenge become stronger. Recently, when W showed him a speech she had prepared, he was critical and told her he thought she could do better. When she reacted like a hurt and whining child, H delivered a fatherly injunction exhorting W to behave like an adult and give of her best. Prior to his experience with the men's group, H feels he would have retracted his critical comments. This time, he did something different in holding his ground and addressing W in a manner which he considered to be direct, honest and frank, albeit perhaps hurtful. Following this, W delivered what H considered to be a marvelous speech and one which brought tears to his eyes. H feels W responded to his challenge, exceeding both of their expectations, and reaping the

benefit by feeling immensely proud of herself.

Standing his ground was not easy for H who confessed to feeling anxious during his confrontation with W. He associates his anxious feelings with his terror of becoming like his father, a man who never backed down and who brutally imposed his will upon others. But, unlike his father, H feels his own intentions are benevolent. He intends to act, not self-servingly or out of anger, but in what he considers to be the best interests of his family, even if the immediate rewards are not apparent.

Elaborating upon what he means by, "we often have to negotiate my tolerance level", H clarifies that he needs to disengage from W when he is not in the mood for a discussion. To illustrate this, he describes how the previous evening he and W had a minor quarrel, after which he observed W repeatedly kicking at the cat. He interpreted this to mean she was still angry with him but was taking her feelings out on the animal. He felt annoyed and told her to leave the cat alone, at which W lost her temper, accusing him of trying to control her by telling her what to do. H refused to continue the argument, and told W to leave. He affirms that he would never disengage from her in this way if W was expressing a clear need. However, in this case she was annoying him and, although he felt a little guilty, knowing she was upset, he was too irritated and tired to care. Upon reflection, he felt they both behaved childishly. He owns W's fallibilities annoy him at times but he knows he is not perfect either.

H observes how W strives to be perfect, continually overworking herself, and rarely taking the time to finish one project before starting another. He feels he can best help by forgiving mistakes she makes and judging her less severely than she judges herself. He also feels he wants to help her let go of her futile quest for perfection, realize that all judgment is relative, learn to relax, and start enjoying life in the present.

In elaborating upon the lived impact of W's sexual abuse on his own life, H describes how W's fragile sense of self and her insecurity lead her to behave erratically. Appearing confident, she will embark upon a course of action when, suddenly, doubt and fear seem to assail her and she abruptly changes direction. For H, this is difficult and confusing to live with. In situations where she does not feel completely safe, W can become intensely distressed and immobilised by her fear and H finds it exhausting to constantly have to reassure her. It seems to H that the intensity with which W goes into, what he calls "a siege of emotions" is excessive. At first this was very painful for him to live with, but it is easier now that he has learned to step back a little and regard her emotional storms with more detachment.

H believes W's earlier abuse has been carried into their sexual life together in the sense that her painful past is always with her. In his words, "... when we're making love, I'm not just making love to her but to her past as well". When they first made love together, they had an agreement that he would

always ask whether each step in his love-making was acceptable to her, e.g. "Is this OK? Is this alright?". For him, this was "like walking on eggshells", prohibiting any spontaneity. However, his strong desire for W enabled him to accommodate to her requests. Ironically, H feels he has absorbed W's pain into himself to such an extent that he now sometimes experiences imagery of sexual abuse himself, when making love. H views this unpleasant turn of events as analogous to a man experiencing intense pain while his wife is in childbirth.

H describes what it is like to be with W when her sexual abuse memories invade her being. He sees pure terror in her eyes as she panics and her body stiffens. It is so awful to witness that "it stops everything cold" for him. There are times when W confuses H with her sexually abusive father. When H gets the sense that W is reacting to him as if he were her father, it fills him with such horror that he immediately withdraws from love-making. Sometimes, while looking at W's face and wondering what she is thinking, his own roaming fantasy may latch onto an image of incestuous sex. Although he warns himself to stay clear of these taboo images during love-making, they sometimes erupt into his consciousness and kill his desire. H understands from these experiences that in the intensity of sexual passion he is unguarded and therefore more open to pleasure but also more vulnerable to disturbing fantasies.

At times, in H's perception, sexual intimacy between them continues to be confusing and fraught. Since H returned from the

men's group weekend and made his demand that she remove her night clothes, W has pulled back from him. H understands that W is refusing to be sexually intimate with him because he frightened her and her fear will have to be addressed. He accepts that their relationship needs repairing and he will have to pay the price for his transgression. For a start, H has assured W that her body is her own and has promised not to put any pressure on her. In his view, they are experiencing a temporary setback and their former intimacy will be restored when W learns she can trust him again, but he is also aware that this may take a while. He states with conviction that he is sincerely committed to W and is prepared to wait for a very long time until she is ready to trust him again.

Reflecting further upon events which have been influential in the way their relationship has evolved, H refers to the unique and profound impact of his exposure to a more masculine view of the world. He feels his weekend with his men's group heightened his lived dilemmas about his own sense of masculinity and manhood and opened up a new direction of change for him. It brought home to him the necessity of understanding and integrating his life's experiences in order to evolve and move forward. Newly focussed upon what seems salient, H has decided to actively pursue his perceived course in life. He accepts that he may not succeed but vows, thoughtfully and seriously, to commit himself to his wife and family and to live his life fully in the present. He expresses tremendous excitement about taking his first steps in

this new direction of change. However, as if suddenly hearing a note of excessiveness in his own voice, H also questions his enthusiasm and optimism and wonders aloud whether the powerful medication he is presently taking may be contributing to his elevated mood.

In thinking about what advice he might give to a man embarking upon a relationship with a survivor of sexual abuse, H reflects that it would probably be beyond the powers of most young men to sustain such an intrinsically difficult relationship and considers that he himself was barely mature enough. He would caution any man to avoid such a demanding a relationship unless he wanted to make a huge commitment to someone, who would, in turn, be worthy of this. H strongly asserts how important it would be for the man to actively claim a place for himself in the relationship. In his case, H feels his spirituality has been a source of essential sustenance to him and he believes it has bolstered his inner strength. H believes that if this hypothetical man were to commit himself to such a challenging course, it could change his life. H's relationship with W has shown him that pain and darkness can be transformed into love and light and this has been awe-inspiring. In his words, this is "very advanced living".

Although his relationship with W has been pervaded by emotional turmoil and anger, H has the sense that they have crested the hill in their inching and painful journey "towards wisdom". Their journey has been arduous but their travails have



strengthened their relationship. H feels they have been transformed through their struggle to overcome the traumas of their childhoods, in a way perhaps not possible for couples who do not have traumatic pasts to contend with. H is reluctant to credit the anguish they have suffered for the transformation they have wrought. However, he believes there is a spiritual dimension involved, in that those who transcend suffering, like the survivors of the Holocaust, can emerge as personally enriched and deeply thoughtful human beings. Nevertheless, H would not wish this painful journey on anyone else. Looking to the future, H perceives that their task as a couple is to integrate what they have learned from their pain. He foresees that he and W will continue to experience conflicts but he considers this to be an integral aspect of the authentic relationship they are co-creating - one in which each of them will be able to see the other as a real person, no longer hidden beneath the emotional encumbrances of the past.

## RESULTS II:

### Thematic Commonalities and Variations

As shown in the situated structures, the subjective and intersubjective meanings inherent in the phenomenon of living the aftermath of child sexual abuse relationally are extremely complex. In this chapter, we present the thematic commonalities and variations arising from further reflection upon the situated structures. The matrix of themes for the two women and then for the two men will be presented, followed by the matrix of subjective and intersubjective themes for the two couples. This thematic focus on the warp and the woof of the fabric will hopefully throw further light on how the phenomenon is lived subjectively as well as intersubjectively.

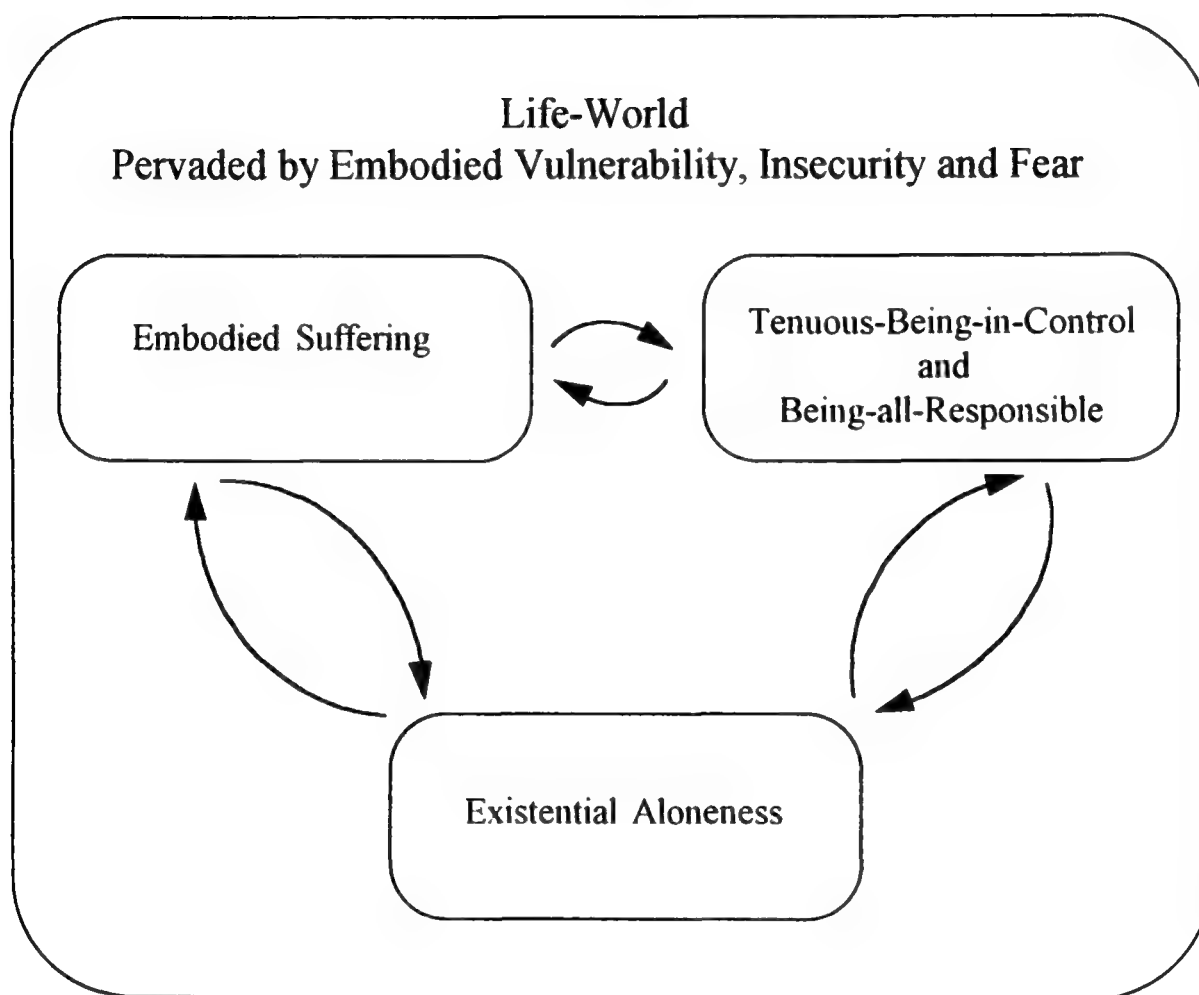
#### Matrix of Themes for the Women

When the situated structures for the two women were further reflected upon, four major themes common to the experience of both women emerged: (a) living a life-world pervaded by embodied, vulnerability, insecurity and fear; (b) embodied suffering; (c) tenuous-being-in-control and being-all-responsible, and (d) existential aloneness. Three of these themes were found to be dialectically related as schematically represented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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**Figure 1:** Matrix of Themes for the Women

Before presenting the themes and their interrelatedness, it is important to recall that the two women were at different stages of their healing from sexual abuse when they were interviewed (See Appendix B). Despite a preponderance of commonalities in the ways these women live the embodied aftermath of child sexual abuse, there were also individual variations, some of which may relate to where they were in their journey toward healing.

Living a Life-World pervaded by Embodied Vulnerability,  
Insecurity and Fear

The phenomenological analysis reveals that the life-worlds of these two women are pervaded by feelings of embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear on a daily basis. At times, they may experience some fluctuation in the extent to which their existential freedom and potentiality feel constricted by the wariness and fearfulness with which they live. In situations where they feel relatively safe and secure, their sense of danger may recede to the horizon of their awareness, opening up a space wherein they can exist more freely. But when they feel threatened or have to face situations which feel unfamiliar and unpredictable, the horizon of danger closes in again. The second woman stated poignantly, "The biggest issue in my life is security" and later she added, "I don't live freely". Having been abused as children means to these women that they have spent years mired in their pasts and this has restricted their possibilities for being fully themselves.

There are times when both these women feel intensely threatened and overwhelmed. At such times, they describe a sudden heightening of their everyday-just-manageable levels of embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear. Feelings from their abusive pasts may begin to invade their present, and catastrophe seems immanent. It is as if they fear they are about to relive the awfulness of the sexual abuse all over again.

Reflection upon this theme shows that excessive fearfulness is evoked in these women whenever they feel unwell, despondent or not-in-control. During the interview, the first woman became insightfully aware that, at times like these, she feels utterly alone and with no one to rely on but herself. Metaphorically, the fear of being weak and vulnerable appears to mirror these women's earlier embodied experiences of not being able to prevent their fathers from sexually abusing them. As children, they were not able to protect the boundaries of their innocent selves against intrusion. As adult women, they live their embodied vulnerability by fighting never to be perceived as vulnerable and weak again.

It was evident from the situated structures, that these women, while often projecting a tough, uncompromising personal stance, simultaneously question their own ability to maintain being-in-control. Deeply self-doubting, they implicitly live the enduring ambiguity of never really knowing who to hold responsible for their sexual abuse--their violating fathers or their own weak, and perhaps complicit, selves. One of the ways

in which they appear to understand the act of sexual violation symbolically is as a tragic betrayal of themselves. For the most part, the women in our study work to metaphorically fortify themselves against the threat of overt enemies without as well as against the implicit "traitor" within. Their efforts to barricade their embodied vulnerability against the next betrayal are all the more exhausting for having to be directed both outward and inward.

The second woman described two manifestations of how she lives the aftermath of her sexual abuse, which were not mentioned by the first. She senses that living her life-world pervaded by fear and insecurity radically sets her apart from women who have never been sexually abused. In her isolation and alienation, she feels she wants to exclude all women who are not survivors of sexual abuse from her social world. But, at the same time, she does not want to feel defined by her abuse. She yearns to feel not marked and stigmatised, but, in her words, just "a regular part of society and all women".

The second woman also described an intense heightening of her fear and insecurity when men are nearby. She is constantly on guard against sexual advances and is conscious of her need to defend and protect her whole body against the possibility of further violation. At these times, she lives her body as the potential object of the exploitative intentions of others. She is constantly reminded of her womanhood and is painfully convinced that there will always be men who are prepared to

wantonly violate the bodily integrity of others.

### Embodied Suffering

In their pasts, these two women suffered the particular violation of having their innocent bodies objectified and used for their father's sexual gratification. In this, as the phenomenologist Iris Young (1980) has pointed out, they were reduced to "mere body", the object of another's intentions and manipulations. Phenomenological analysis reveals that the sexual abuse ruptured the unity of their embodied subjectivity and left them living their bodies ambiguously, and at times dualistically, as either subject or object, mine or another's. To the extent that they suspect their bodies of having betrayed them, these women reject their bodies as traitorous enemies. In doing so, they are in a sense "disembodying" themselves and treating their own bodies as objects to be loathed and despised. Not only are there times when these women feel utterly alone-in-the-world, but, more fundamentally, there are times when they may feel temporarily removed from their bodies. To intentionally disown or abandon one's lived body is the most radical split imaginable - a fundamental aberration of the human condition.

Reflection upon the situated structures, shows that these two women live the aftermath of their sexual abuse as embodied pain and suffering. They live relationally with their suffering in the sense that it is always with them--sometimes distant, sometimes close. This theme of embodied suffering varies from the other themes in the sense that it is manifested in strikingly

different ways by these two women. As children abused by their fathers, they each embodied their abuse in their own way. Presently, as adults living with the aftermath of their sexual abuse, the unique and complex ways in which this is expressed reflect each of these women's individuality as an embodied-subject-in-the world.

Both women are aware that the past can never be fully erased. It is a huge relief to the first woman that she no longer lives the abuse as intensely as she did during her years in therapy. Her suffering has gradually lessened, but she knows, that no matter how long she lives, "there will always be a grain there." The second woman, in contrast, often feels at a loss as to how to endure all the disorienting intrusions from the past which invade her everyday life-world. She desperately wishes the embodied memories of her abusive childhood could be erased, but she knows this is not possible.

Both these women live their sexuality ambivalently. The first woman described what can be viewed as a polarization in her experience of sexual relationships. In her two previous long-term sexual relationships, she was erotically aroused by the dominating forcefulness of one lover, and excited by the passion of another whose sexual experience she lived vicariously. In both these relationships, she came to feel demeaned by the sense that her body was there for the use and pleasure of another while her own needs were ignored. Her relationship with her husband has been very different in that she feels he has not objectified her



and is thoughtful and caring. Yet, sadly and ironically, she feels emotionally disengaged from him during love-making and longs for some of the forcefulness and intense emotional expressiveness of her previous lovers, who were in fact more like her father. The second woman cherishes the extraordinary sense of safety and comfort she has been able to feel in her intimate relationship with her present husband. She recalls how together they weathered the difficult time when she was having flashbacks whenever they had sex. However, a few months before being interviewed, she became painfully aware that her trust for her husband had been contingent upon her being in control of their sex life. As soon as she perceived him to be trying to dominate and control her, she felt once more thrown out of her tenuous security into panic and mistrust.

Neither of these women have been able to satisfactorily resolve their relationship with their fathers. The first woman ultimately felt she had to let go of her hope that her father would try to redeem himself through coming to terms with what he had done to her. It was difficult and painful for her to let go and she was wracked with guilt when he died. The second woman still experiences feelings of rage and disgust towards her father and has never resolved whether she should address the issue of her sexual abuse with him. She believes that at the core of all her embodied pain and suffering lies his betrayal of her trust in him.

Each of these women lives her embodied suffering in her own way. The first woman has experienced two lengthy periods in her life when she felt despondent, bleak and existentially very alone. At the time she was interviewed, she was only just beginning to feel that she was recovering her vitality and her sense of herself. The second woman, who is suffering from fibromyalgia, believes her previously repressed childhood anguish is now surfacing and expressing itself not only in emotional distress but in bodily pain which is becoming more intense. Assailed by her memories and feeling alone when her husband does not comprehend their power, her days are painful and exhausting.

#### Tenuous-Being-in-Control and Being-all-Responsible

In their day-to-day existences, these two women manifestly live trying to be-in-control of everything and everyone in their life-worlds. Reflection upon the psychological meaning of this way of being-in-the-world raises the possibility that, for these women, being-in-control is the lived reversal of being-controlled-and-dominated by their abusive fathers when they were children. It appeared from the findings, that having been overwhelmed and intruded upon as children, these women came to believe that others were potentially dangerous. As adults, they endeavour to protect their violated, embodied selves against further abuse by becoming agents of their own defense.

The phenomenological analysis reveals that these women feel compelled to be-in-control because they cannot trust that anyone else will effectively protect and guard their vulnerable selves

from further harm. Similarly, it is almost impossible for them to believe that others would want to take care of them and would not betray them. Feeling existentially alone, they have erected emotional barricades to protect themselves against being betrayed or abused again. The way they seek to accomplish this is by trying to assume control of everything and everyone and by holding themselves entirely responsible for whatever transpires within their life-worlds.

One of the ways these two women live tenuous-being-in-control and all-responsible is by desperately trying to be perfect. They set themselves impossibly high standards. As was shown in the situated structures, not only do they expect themselves to be superlative mothers and raise exemplary children, but they also expect perfection of themselves in more mundane areas like never having an untidy house or making an error in balancing their cheque books. Although rationally they might accept the impossibility of achieving perfection in all they do, this remains their constant striving and exhausting plight. Overly caught up in trying to ensure that everything is done flawlessly, they tend to become exhausted, depleted, and overwhelmed and this inevitably takes its toll upon their health. They long to free themselves from their pursuit of perfection and permit their own unspoken needs to find a place alongside their desire to take care of their loved ones.

Tenuous-being-in-control and all-responsible is also manifested by hypervigilance, especially when it comes to the

well-being and safety of their children. This was particularly true of the second woman interviewed in this study. Both women experience themselves as always on guard, unable to ignore the slightest murmur from a sleeping child and never trusting that anyone else will be as watchful and cognizant of lurking dangers as they themselves are. The second woman goes so far as to prefer not to leave her daughter in the care of her husband, regarding him as insufficiently responsible and even negligent at times. These women are able to acknowledge that their excessive effort constantly to ensure their children's safety, probably appears extreme and unrealistic to others. Nevertheless, they feel compelled to vigilance, believing the ultimate responsibility for the safety of their families rests on their shoulders. Being-all-responsible is also lived by these two women as not being able to relinquish control over the myriad tasks of everyday living. They find it difficult to turn to anyone for help or to trust that others might be willing, and competent enough, to share some of their self-imposed burden.

Both women tend to live being-all-responsible by being quick to blame themselves for anything which goes wrong in their life-worlds. This was particularly true for the first woman, who initially blamed herself for the absence of sexual passion in her intimate relationship. Also, despite all reassurances to the contrary, when her father died of a heart attack, she held herself responsible for metaphorically breaking his heart by revealing the secret that he had sexually abused her.

Both these women live tenuous-being-in-control in their sexual relationships with their husbands. It was seen from the situated structures, that they are powerfully aware of how radically their present sexual relationships differ from their previous ones. It has made a crucial difference for them to have found men who do not use them as sexual objects and who understand and accept how imperative it is for them to have control over their bodies and their sexuality. This has meant that, for the first time in their lives, these women have been able to experience a measure of security and trust in their sexual relationships. For the first woman it has meant experiencing orgasmic sex for the first time. Neither of these women can tolerate the idea of being sexually controlled or dominated. The mere that they might be sexually objectified can catapult them into intense panic and terror.

### Existential Aloneness

The theme of existential aloneness is the one which most powerfully and tragically captures the essential core of these women's lived experience of childhood sexual abuse. The brutal act of sexual abuse perpetrated by their fathers left them no longer safely nested in the web of family relationships. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (1962), the givenness of intersubjective relatedness in which they had been living as innocent children, had been ruptured. Barral (1993), writing about Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the role of the body in relationships, says of primary relationships which are so ruptured, "To be so severed

from others is to be severed from the ground of being itself because it is through others that we have access to the world, to being, and the community of humans" (p.173).

Phenomenological analysis reveals that, as adults, these women continue to live the aftermath of parental violation by feeling metaphorically abandoned and orphaned. In the core of themselves, they feel existentially alone and not able to believe that there is anyone in the world that they can truly trust and rely upon. Having once had the boundaries of their innocently lived bodies tragically violated, they persistently live the possibility that they may be violated again. This fear can never be erased and is lived enduringly as an embodied vulnerability to further intrusion. Not only were they fundamentally betrayed as children by the fathers they should have been able to trust, but neither of them reported feeling able to turn to their mothers for protection. As adults, these two women live their lives implicitly anticipating that they will be betrayed again, or, at the very least, not protected by others who sense their vulnerability, and this includes their intimate partners.

The first woman stated poignantly that her most profound fear is her fear of being abandoned which means, to her, facing utter aloneness. Rationally she is aware that she has friends and a loving husband to support her, but, in the essential core of herself, she still feels abandoned and alone. Despite the presence of her husband, the second woman described feeling entirely alone and with no-one who would understand and respond

to this fear (e.g., on the occasion when she faced the prospect of an impending storm).

For these women, having been betrayed by their fathers and not protected by their mothers, robbed them of the sense of having a protector to turn to. They were left existentially alone and feeling they had only themselves to rely on. As adults, these women experience others as blind, or short-sighted, to the immanent presence of danger. The perceived inadequacies of others condemns them to being forever on the alert, highly attuned to possible catastrophe, and everlastingly on guard.

#### A Compellingly Repetitive Cycle

The women in this study described how their abusive pasts inevitably invade and re-invade their present with a certain regularity. Reflection upon this recurrent phenomenon suggests that the themes discussed above are dynamically interrelated in a compellingly lived repetitive cycle which has become ritualized over the years. The cyclical pattern which revealed itself through phenomenological analysis has been schematised in Figure 2.

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Insert Figure 2 here

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It appears from the findings that within these women's life-worlds, pervaded as they are by embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear, their sense of tenuous-being-in-control and

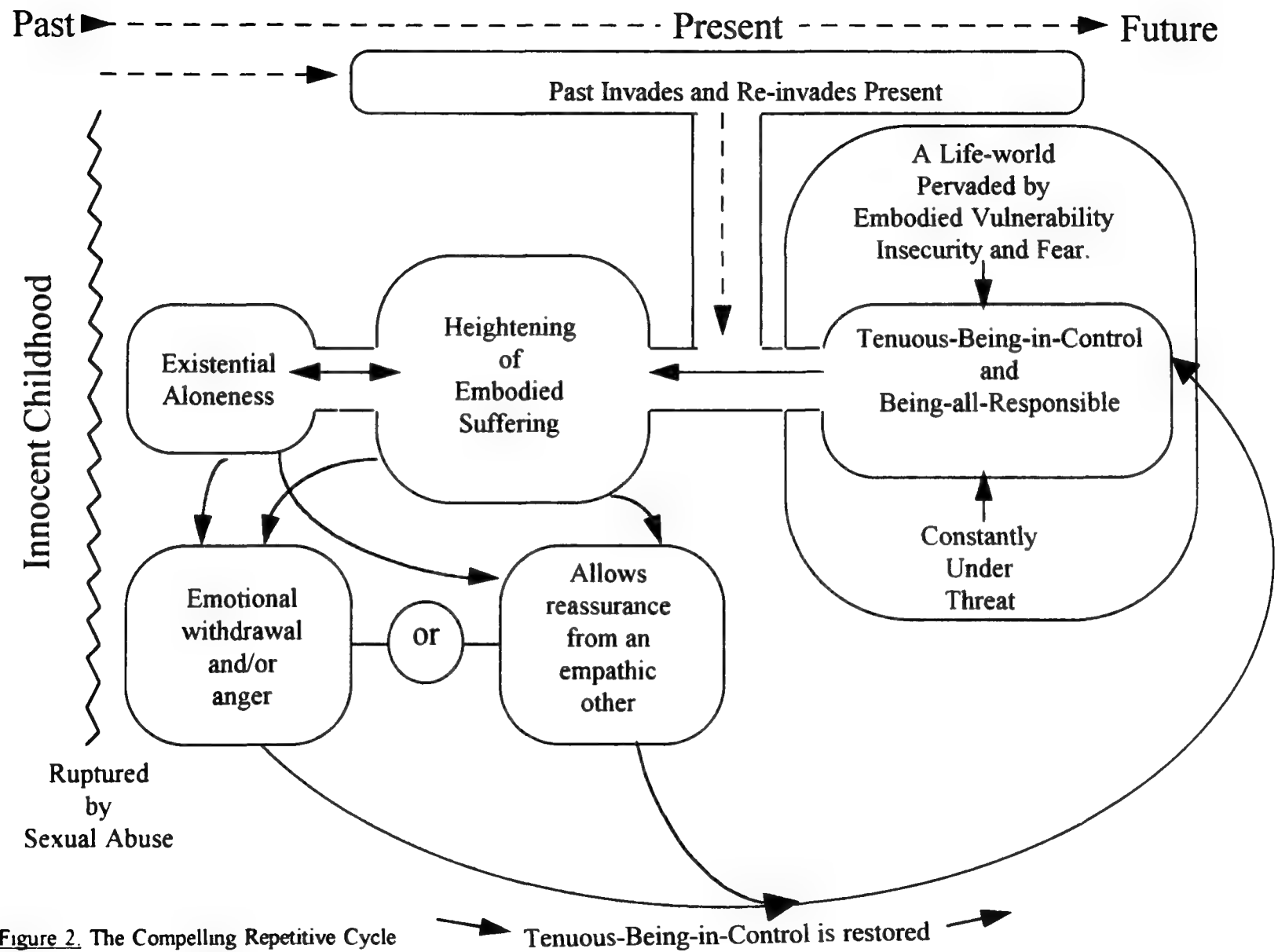


Figure 2. The Compelling Repetitive Cycle



being-all-responsible is always vulnerable to threat. This is compounded when they perceive that others are trying to dominate or control them or when they are feeling personally weakened, for example, when they are ill or exhausted. As they begin to sense that they are no longer fully in control, feelings from the past begin to invade the present and these women describe a rapid intensification of their ever-present feelings of embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear. Sometimes, the past re-invades the present with such vehemence that the women experience terror, panic and a sense of immanent catastrophe. At these times, they may be overwhelmed by a profound sense of existential aloneness.

Over the years, these women have found ways to recover from the onslaughts of their abusive pasts, and push back the terror of existential aloneness. There is some regularity to the way they do this, although sometimes their partners seem more aware than the women themselves of their habitual patterns of response. One way the women respond is by marshalling all their reserves of strength in order to regain control. When assailed by memories and flashbacks during sex, they may withdraw emotionally even to the extent of disengaging from their bodily experience. During confrontations, they may become enraged and attack the person threatening their being-in-control, with a fury out of all proportion to the issue at hand. If they are within an empathic relationship, they may allow a loving other to reassure and comfort them--someone who understands what their manifest

behaviour means and can be present with them until the horizon of their abusive past recedes again. This was found to be particularly true of the second couple in this study.

In other words, when their pasts invade their present life-worlds, these women either draw on their reserves of strength, leave the field emotionally, stand and fight back, or, more rarely, allow someone who understands and cares to hold and comfort them until the terror recedes. Gradually, there follows an ebbing away of the re-experienced past, a diminishing of terror and panic, and, sooner or later, a restoration of tenuous-being-in-control.

Reflection upon the situated structures of these women's lived experience reveals that there is a temporal dimension to the way this compelling ritualized cycle is lived. At times of crisis, these women may experience living through this cycle many times during one day. However, the cycle may also be understood as extending temporally over days, weeks, months or years, and a woman may spend varying amounts of time living through the interrelated themes which constitute the cycle. The analysis also raises the possibility that in a healing and empathic relationship, the rigidity of the cycle may begin to loosen up so that it begins to look more like a spiral. In time, couples may be able to move further away from the dark and narrow confines of the past towards a more promising future.

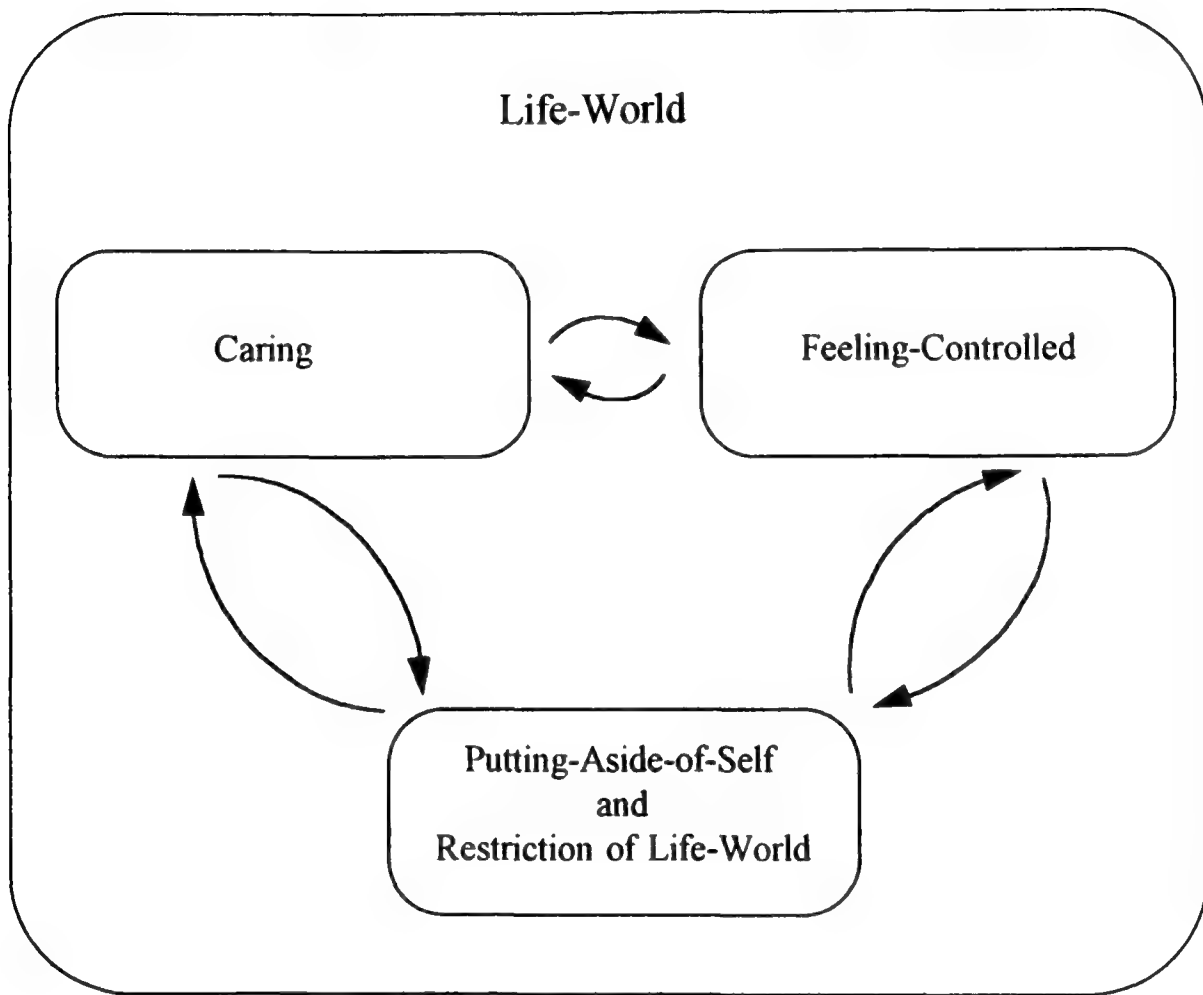
### Matrix of Themes for the Men

The phenomenological analysis reveals strong commonalities but also distinctive variations in how the two men live their relational lives. What these men explicitly have in common is that they have chosen to share their life-worlds and remain in intimate relationships with women who were sexually abused as young children. The situated structures for the women in turn show that they were drawn to their husbands by qualities which reveal how very different they were from the men who had abused or exploited them in the past. What was seen to be of utmost importance to the women was that neither of these men appeared "macho", meaning the women did not perceive them as "aggressively masculine", nor as controlling or dominating in their sexual and personal relationships. Rather, both showed personal qualities of being gentle, sensitive, accepting, and understanding. The women valued immensely that these were men with whom it was possible to talk openly and confidingly as friends as well as lovers. This was a new experience for them and one they had not dreamed would be possible in an intimate relationship with a man. Three dialectically interrelated themes emerged from the situated structures for the men: (a) caring, (b) feeling-controlled, and (c) putting-aside-of-self and restriction of life-world. These themes are schematized in Figure 3.

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Insert Figure 3 here

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**Figure 3:** Matrix of Themes for the Men

### Caring

Sharing their wives' life-worlds, which they perceived to be pervaded by embodied suffering, self-doubt and fear, called forth caring from these men--the desire to protect, reassure, comfort and sustain their wives. Heidegger (1962/1926) has described the call to care as foundational to human existence. Faced with the embodied suffering of the women they loved, these men spontaneously and lovingly responded to the call to care. In their intense focus on caring for their wives, however, both men were found to have neglected care for their own being and becoming to the extent that they experienced themselves as depleted.

Although the theme of caring was found to be common to the relational experience of both of these men, there were differences in the way each man manifested his caring. The first man reported that it had been personally gratifying for him to support his wife's healing and bolster her courage. His caring appeared to be grounded in his philosophical sense of justice and equality rather than in empathy for his wife's embodied suffering. He described himself as always trying to be fair and responsible. Reflection upon the findings reveal that this man is living his wife's embodied suffering with stoicism. He is patiently waiting for her lively vigour to return after a long period of despondency, and for her to engage, eventually, in a more intimate closeness and passionate sexual relationship with him. The second man's caring was revealed to be an expression of

his empathy for his wife's suffering and his sense that they are bound together in their shared understanding of the pain they each suffered in childhood. The situated structures show that when he met her, he intuitively knew that this was a woman who needed his loving care and he, in turn, found it personally satisfying to feel useful and appreciated when he cheered and comforted her. Concerned at how harshly she judged herself, he saw his role as being tolerant, quick to forgive, reassuring, and understanding.

It appears from the situated structures, that both men are living the theme of caring through fostering the becoming of their wives. In his rigorously fair way, the first man works hard to ensure that he assumes his share of their domestic and child-caring responsibilities, in order to enable his wife to pursue her academic and professional life. He champions her right to make her own decisions and seek her own path. The second man has begun to shift the balance of how he cares for his wife--from caring for her present being, to caring for her becoming. He has reached the conclusion that her dependence on him is not in either of their best interests, and he has been pushing her to extend herself, to transcend her fearfulness, and to manifest her own potentialities more fully. This has been a difficult and painful process for both of them but he feels they are both beginning to benefit from the challenge to change.

### Feeling-Controlled

Reflection upon the situated structures suggested that, in some ways, these two men live feeling-controlled as a reversal of stereotypical gender roles and as feeling discounted. Although the phenomenological analysis shows that they try hard to be entirely responsible, trustworthy, and reliable, they live simultaneously with how little it takes to evoke their wives' mistrust. The first man has found that just by forgetting a small errand, he can incur his wife's wrath and her comment, "It just proves I shouldn't have trust in you". Resentfully, he interprets her quick mistrust to mean she is trying to prove there is no one in the world she can truly rely upon. The second man found he had drastically shaken his wife's trust when he fell asleep while minding their daughter. These men have experienced how the hard-earned trust of years can be reduced to mistrust in a matter of seconds, leaving them, exhaustingly, having to build it up again.

The analysis reveals the first man to have been experiencing considerable pain in feeling-controlled by his wife. For example, when she insisted they raise their first child "her way", he was left feeling shut out from the kind of close involvement he wanted to have with his baby son. He also suffers when she severely criticises his ability to make decisions involving the management of their finances; and when he experiences her trying to impose her own domestic priorities and time schedules upon him. He understands that her need to be-in-

control emanates from her fearfulness and that it is more pronounced when she is feeling overwhelmed. Nevertheless, he finds it irritating and difficult to live with. He wishes his wife could focus less intensely on his oversights and sometimes just overlook them or forgive them.

Both men experience feeling-controlled by their wives' intense expression of emotion. The second man described this as "living on an emotional roller coaster". The findings show how both men experience their wives as frequently blowing trivial matters out of all proportion. Within minutes, they can feel dragged into a maelstrom of fury, spiralling downward into deeper levels of hostility and irrationality. The first man describes his wife as "the merciless lady", finding that even if he apologizes she still attacks him for not apologizing sooner. It is not only through their wives' anger that these men experience feeling-controlled. Often it is not fury that they have to contend with, but despondency and despair. The second man talks of times when his wife's past invades their relationship and he feels pulled into her overwhelming sadness. The first man has endured a lengthy period during which his wife was emotionally and physically unavailable to him. He also lives with her daily preoccupation and intense dislike of her own body, which he experiences as leaving her irritable and rejecting of him. He feels that her moodiness shuts him out of the possibility of intimate closeness with her and that her discontent infuses their home life.



The phenomenological analysis reveals that the most complex and exacting way in which these men experience feeling-controlled, is in their sexual relationships with their wives. Perhaps because the area of sexuality is so closely bound with issues of trust and vulnerability, it is here that setbacks and crises can occur most easily. In the core of their shared sexual relationships, each of these men has experienced coming face to face with the pain of their wives' past abuse. The situated structure for the second man shows how awful it is for him that, as he puts it, "... when we're making love, I'm not just making love to her but to her past as well". The findings show that these men have come to understand that in the area of sexuality, above all, their wives must be-in-control. This is the only way they can feel safe from their fears of domination, exploitation and objectification which can quickly overwhelm their desire. We saw that the first man described embarking on love-making as like negotiating a legal contract, where everything has to be spelled out and agreed upon and where any diversion from the routine and predictable would be frightening and unacceptable to his wife. Given his wife's current lack of interest in sex, this man feels he has no choice but to put his own sexual needs "a bit on hold". The second man described how, for a while, he had to ask whether each step in their love-making was acceptable to his wife. He described this as "like walking on eggshells" - tentative and lacking all spontaneity. In the situated structures it was seen that, having recently broken the "rules" and frightened his wife,

this man is presently paying the price of her sexual withdrawal.

Putting-aside-of-Self and Restriction of Life-world

The lived aftermath of their wives' child sexual abuse has been focal within the intimate relationships of each of these men. Both experienced a compelling urgency to respond to the embodied suffering, fear and insecurity of their wives' day-to-day existence. They felt pulled to attend, first and foremost, to the call to care which this evokes. Responding to the call to care has entailed a putting-aside-of-self and a restriction of life-world for each of them. These two men have chosen, at least for the time being, to place their own desires and needs on hold, in order to devote themselves to the well-being of their wives and the survival of their intimate relationships.

The second man, experienced the shock of having his wife's previously kept-out-of-awareness abuse experience intrusively erupt into their love-making. The analysis reveals how he wholeheartedly joined his wife in a mutual struggle to heal from the scars of the past. For this man, who had learned in his youth to care for his lonely and unhappy mother through listening, reassuring, and comforting, caring for his wife in this way felt familiar. However, the findings show that he began to feel "crowded" by what he perceived to be her insatiable craving for his care and attention. He recognized his part in fostering her reliance on him by "playing the psychologist", but he began to resent being constantly called upon to reassure her and yearned for personal space of his own.

The situated structures show that the first man, more than the second, explicitly expresses how he is suffering from living a restricted sexual relationship with his wife. When he met her, his first sense of his wife was that she was an adventurous "wild woman" and he expected her to be free and passionate in her love-making. When, instead, he found her to be cautious and wary and to need routine and predictability when making love, it was a shock and a grave disappointment to him. He longs for variety, excitement, and spontaneity in their love-making, but fears that sex is going to continue to be relatively unimportant to his wife. Reflection upon the situated structures raises the further possibility that this man is struggling with his own self-doubts about being perceived as "nice" but "boring". He seems implicitly to fear that his wife, like other women he has known, may say she loves his gentleness but in fact find sex with forceful, dominating men more exciting.

Although, generally optimistic and positive in their outlook, both men have found it extremely difficult to live with all the turmoil from their wives' abusive pasts. When feeling oppressed by the extra load he has to carry, the first man has sometimes asked himself, "Is it worth it?" He feels hurt and despondent when his wife rejects his approaches for intimacy. He also fears that their life together may permanently be reduced to day-to-day management of their domestic and professional responsibilities. The phenomenological analysis indicates that this man, although struggling to remain optimistic, is feeling

seriously depleted and somewhat resentful. When he met her, he viewed his wife as a catalyst for excitement, change and growth. During the past fifteen months in which she felt exhausted and despondent he has been grieving the loss of her vital contribution towards his romantic ideal of an "intimate project". By this he means, the mutual co-creation of intense excitement and closeness in their marriage.

The second man, too, has experienced a loss of spontaneity and a curtailment of freedom in his sexual relationship with his wife. He is accepting of her need to be-in-control but still sometimes fails to anticipate when his behaviour will be interpreted by her as an attempt to dominate and control her sexually. As the situated structures show, his expressed desire to have her come to bed with him naked evoked in her a huge crisis of terror, mistrust, and retreat from sexuality, which had still not been resolved when they were interviewed months later.

A variation in how these two men are living restriction-of-life-world was seen in the way the second man has vicariously suffered some of the horror of his wife's sexual abuse. During the worst of the time when she was living through "flashbacks", he was so empathically attuned to her anguish that it left him vulnerable to an embodiment of her pain. He compared this to how some men experience intense abdominal pain when their wives are in labour. There were times when it was so awful to witness his wife's terror, that "it stop(ped) everything cold" for him. He has also found that taboo images of incestuous sex sometimes

erupt into his consciousness during love-making, killing his desire and restricting his own natural delight in sex.

It seems from the phenomenological analysis that these men have been implicitly living an ongoing dilemma. Their hope is that they can co-create, with their wives, an intimate adult relationship which is mutual, authentic, sexual, joyful, and emotionally sustaining. But responding to the call to care for the being and becoming of their wives has, at the same time, left them risking depletion and despair through abnegation of self. It is all the more striking, therefore, that despite the fact that they have at times questioned whether they can go on, neither of these men have seriously considered leaving their relationships.

#### Matrix of Subjective and Intersubjective Themes for the Couples

Woven together, the common themes for the women and the men formed a matrix of interrelated meanings which were inherent to how these two couples experienced living with the aftermath of child sexual abuse. Our research questions invited participants to describe their lived relational experience. Perhaps not surprisingly, the analysis reveals that the two women live the persistent aftermath of their sexual abuse in the sense that it is always with them, sometimes crowding close, at other times more distant. The major themes which emerged for the women are expressed personally and are primarily subjective in nature. The men, on the other hand, are thrown into living responsively with how their wives live their past sexual abuse, and the themes

which emerged for them are primarily intersubjective in nature.

Within life-worlds pervaded by embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear for the women, and shared by the men, meaningful patterns of dialectically and/or responsively related themes emerged, which have been schematically diagrammed in Figure 4.

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Insert Figure 4 here

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The top half of the diagram illustrates, in a highly simplified form, the dialectically related themes lived day-to-day by the two women, while the bottom half of the diagram shows the everyday thematic structure for the men. The left side of the diagram shows the relationship between the theme of embodied suffering for the women and the call to care it evokes--the theme of caring--for the men. On the right side of the diagram, is depicted the relationship between tenuous-being-in-control and being-all-responsible as a theme for the women, and the responsive theme of feeling-controlled for the men.

The thematic analysis shows that embodied suffering is endured on a day-to-day basis by the two women in this study. It is manifestly and dialectically lived as an exhausting struggle to be-in-control and all-responsible, in order that others will never again perceive them to be weak or vulnerable. This daily struggle to be-in-control and all-responsible, in turn, takes its

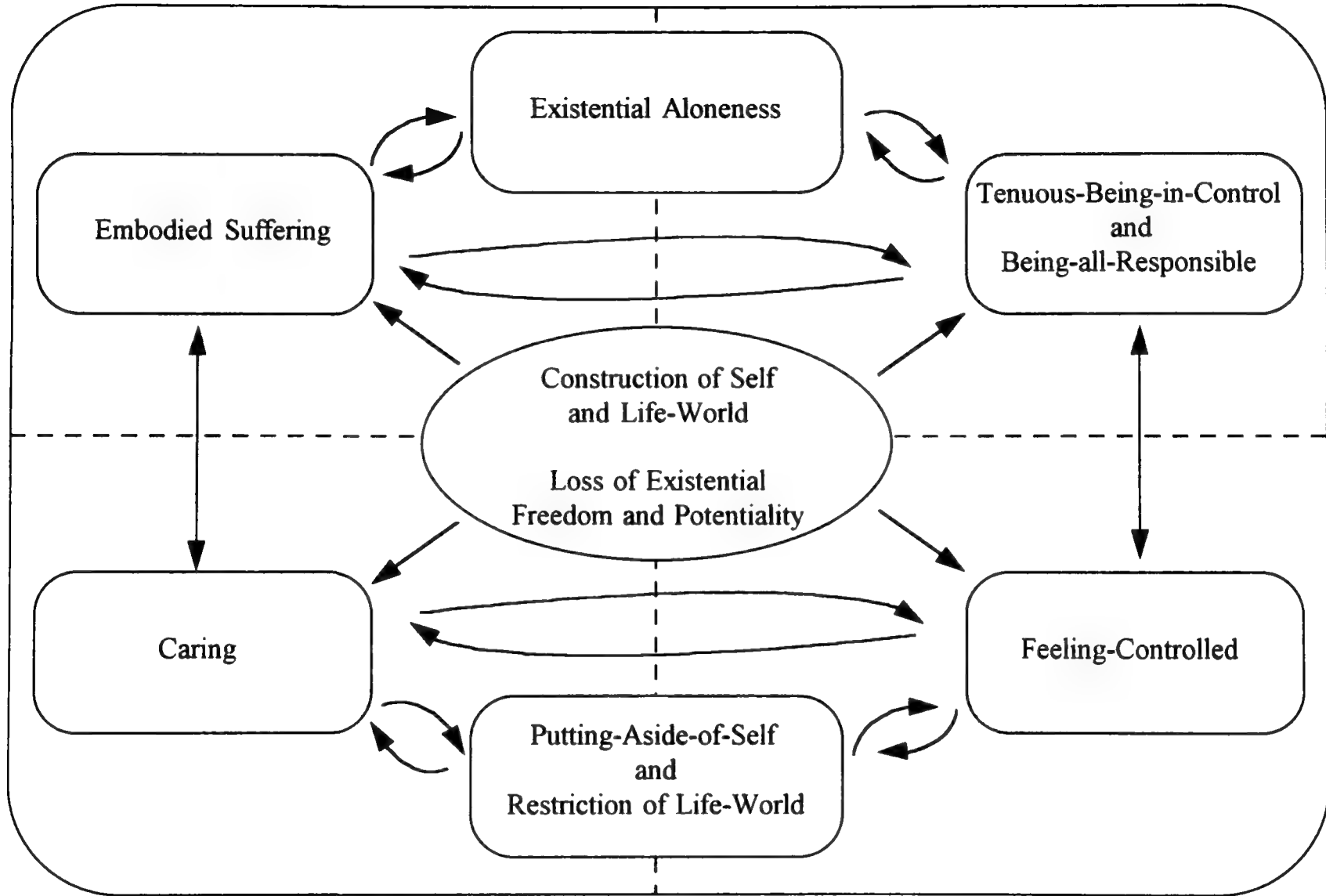


Figure 4. Matrix of Subjective and Intersubjective Themes for the Couples

toll upon their health and intensifies their embodied suffering. Living this daily tension between embodied suffering and tenuous-being-in-control and all-responsible, relates to the ever-present possibility that these women may re-experience feeling existentially alone at times when the balance between the two themes can no longer be maintained. Further, the risk exists for these women that, feeling utterly alone again, they may either collapse into a more enduring despair, or feel so desperate that they leave their partners.

The thematic analysis also shows that there is a dialectical relationship between the common themes manifestly lived by the two men in their day-to-day existences. The men appear to be living an ongoing dilemma and tension between the theme of caring for their wives and the theme of feeling-controlled by them. This suggests, dialectically, that to the extent that their self and life-worlds become increasingly constricted by feeling-controlled, the willingness to care may diminish. Or, vice versa, caring may begin to be experienced by the men as feeling-controlled by the need to constantly attend to the call to care. The theme of putting-aside-of self and restriction-of-life-world is lived implicitly, and at times manifestly, as depletion and resentment. Putting-aside-of-self can also be viewed as a potential sinkhole for the men. In other words, there is a risk that as they feel increasingly depleted and discouraged, they may sink into a more enduring despair. Alternately, the possibility exists that the men may become resentful enough that they give up



on their relationships and leave their wives.

The matrix of interrelated themes suggests two further possible dilemmas for these couples. The left side of the diagram shows the dialectical relationship between the theme of embodied suffering for the women and the theme of caring for the men. The possibility exists that the couple might become overwhelmed by the burden of suffering and the exhaustion of caring such that, together, they might slide into a shared and enduring despondency.

On the right side of the diagram, where the dialectical relationship between the theme of tenuous-being-in-control and all-responsible for the women and the theme of feeling-controlled for the men is portrayed, a different kind of dilemma presents itself. Reflection upon the situated structures for these two men suggests that they are living the theme of feeling-controlled as an implicit response to their wives being-in-control. When one partner is in-control and the other is feeling-controlled, the precarious balance of equality and mutuality in the relationship is out of kilter. Moreover, if being-in-control and all-responsible is extreme in its manifestation, partners may grow increasingly resentful and angry, accentuating the possibility of the relationship becoming openly conflictual and breaking apart.

The middle of the diagram schematically represents two central interdependent themes for these couples - "constriction of self and life-world" and "loss of existential freedom and

potentiality"; themes which both couples live implicitly, and at times manifestly. These dark themes can be viewed as negative possibilities for the couples which are potentially counterpoised by an alternative possibility for subjective and intersubjective transcendence and transformation.

The two couples were living the dynamic and dialectical configurations of their everyday existence, like a children's string game of Cat's Cradle<sup>1</sup>. Somehow, despite serious difficulties, they were managing to preserve the fine tensions within the structure of their relationships. And, they were doing this without either getting hopelessly entangled and becoming despondent or unravelling and rupturing the relationship. Rather, the phenomenological analysis shows that these two couples were struggling toward subjective and intersubjective transformation. The powerful theme of transformation for these couples was found to be manifested, firstly in the way they are moving toward an understanding of how the aftermath of child sexual abuse can be weathered relationally, and secondly, in their struggle for mutuality in the being and becoming of both self and other.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Elaine Clark (1995) for this analogy. In her study of a family with a head-injured member, she metaphorically referred to the string game of Cat's Cradle. She visualised the fingers of the players as the members of the family and saw the string as symbolically representing the interwovenness of existential themes as lived by the family. She described how movement of the fingers alters the configuration of connections - sometimes the fingers are close, at other times distant. Also, some of the fingers are more actively engaged in the changing of patterns while others are less free to move.

The results reveal that, through their individual reflection and relational dialogue, the subjects in this study have come to understand some of the repetitive and patterned ways in which they are living the aftermath of child sexual abuse. For example, both women have become aware that their explosive outbursts of rage usually occur at times when they are feeling fearful, weak, and vulnerable, or at risk for losing their tenuous hold on being-in-control.

The women's angry outbursts have been a feature of each couples' relationship, although decreasingly so over time. As seen in the situated structure for the second man, he describes how his wife used to become so irrationally enraged that she was "almost foaming at the mouth". With her help, he has learned to recognize that at times like these she has probably begun to re-live some interpersonal trauma from her past. Now, as soon as he recognizes the pattern, he stops arguing and reaches for her to comfort and calm her. At this point, she usually breaks into tears and feels remorseful. His wife insightfully understands that she sometimes has to go through this ritual of becoming enraged and being comforted, in order for her true feelings to emerge into her own awareness. It is only in the vulnerability of her tears, and when she is being lovingly held, that she knows what she needs to say to her husband.

During the painful period when the wife of the second couple was re-experiencing the terror of her sexual abuse whenever they made love, she was able to make it clear that her feelings of

revulsion belonged to her father and not to her husband. She repeatedly told her husband, "It's not you. It's not you", thus enabling him to stay close and caring while they weathered the storm together. The findings for this couple are suggestive of how growing understanding, continuous and open dialogue, and holding onto each other through crises enables them to survive some of the recurring difficulties prevalent in the aftermath of child sexual abuse.

The picture is somewhat different for the first couple. The husband has learned to read the signs that his wife is becoming exhausted and overwhelmed by all the responsibilities she assumes, and he will urge her to take time for herself before she starts pushing everyone away by being irritable. However, it has been extremely difficult for him to live with her intense rages. Unlike the first man, he has not fathomed that his wife's angry outbursts may be related to her history of sexual abuse. He has learned that if he admits he has made a mistake and apologizes quickly, he can avoid exacerbating the conflict. But often he is too caught up in the unfairness of her attacks on him to be willing to do this. He sees his wife's angry outbursts as wilful, feels that she "creates (conflict) like a bull", and assumes that she gets some satisfaction out of dragging them both into the downward spiral of her fury.

The phenomenological analysis reveals that both the men in this study, in their intense focus on caring for their wives, had been neglecting the being and becoming of themselves. They each

reported that, for some years prior to being interviewed, they had been living lives of self-sacrifice and both had been feeling restricted in their self and life-worlds. The situated structures suggest that the first man was feeling depleted and resentful and show that the second man had twice become overwhelmed and been diagnosed as depressed. In their awareness of their dilemma and their response to it, these men were found to be very different.

The first man had been stoically waiting for his wife to recover her vigour. He had been consoling himself that he was not personally responsible for her suffering, believing that her despondency and loss of sexual desire were hormonal in origin or related to the exhaustion of child-rearing. In the midst of the darkest time, he had set himself a time-frame of two years to get a sense of whether their relationship was continuing to go downhill or growing stronger. His wife has been urging him to play a more active role in revitalising their intimate relationship. He acknowledged his wife's perspective--that he could not always count on her to be the catalyst for change--but at the time of the interview, he was not yet actively engaged in this process. In his stoic waiting for his wife and his solitary yearning for a closer intimacy with her, it seems this man has neglected to care for the being and becoming of his own self.

In contrast, some months before being interviewed, the second man decided that he could no longer afford to sacrifice himself by playing the "psychologist" in his relationship with

his wife. The situated structures show that he began to feel an imperative need to take time for himself and find a counter-balance to his nurturing and caring side, even though he realized this would present problems for his wife. He has embarked on a journey to discover what it means to be "a real man" and has begun to assert his manhood by behaving in ways which his wife perceives as dominating and controlling. His overt attempt to shift the balance of control and power in their intimate relationship has created a huge crisis of trust for his wife, particularly since he has chosen not to confide in her about this. Secrecy is anathema to her, as it is to most to sexual abuse survivors (Finkelhor, 1988), and she strongly believes that if her husband were to take her into his confidence, with regard to what becoming "a real man" means to him, she might feel considerably less distressed. As it is, the findings show that she has been experiencing a heightening of her embodied vulnerability, fear, and insecurity, at times verging on panic and the terror of immanent catastrophe. Feeling very much alone and shut out of her husband's new bond with other men, this woman has been wondering whether she should just take her young daughter and leave her marriage.

Not only has the second husband begun to actively care for his own being and becoming, but the analysis shows that he has also begun to shift the emphasis in how he cares for his wife. He has begun to focus less on caring for her being and more on her becoming by challenging her to transcend her fears and become

more independent of him. He reported how encouraged he feels when he sees her triumphing over her timidity and feeling proud of her accomplishments. However, his wife has found his newly tough attitude, and his non-communicative, distant behaviour toward her, extremely confusing and frightening. To her, he now feels like a stranger, and not the gentle caring man she married.

Interestingly, the findings show that, for these men, caring is experienced as relational and mutual. They describe feeling cared for, loved, appreciated, listened to, and understood by their wives, albeit only at times when their wives are not focused on battling the demons from their abusive pasts. Both the men have come to believe that their wives' suffering has left them unusually capable of caring for and empathizing with others.

This discussion of the search for mutuality in caring for both the being and becoming of the self and the other in these relationships suggests an intrinsic dilemma. The findings from this study indicate that it is important, but very difficult, to create balance and mutuality in how caring is expressed within the relationship. The findings also reveal how dangerous it can be to shift the careful, if precarious, balance in the structure of the relationship, even if it is, ultimately, in the direction of mutuality. In the case of the second couple, the danger appears to have been gravely exacerbated by the husband consciously excluding his wife from the confidences he shares with the men in his men's group. This has left her feeling

presently abandoned by her best friend.

The phenomenological analysis suggests that these two couples have been implicitly living the shared themes of constriction of self and life-world and loss of existential freedom and potentiality. However, the steadfast loyalty of the men and their capacity to put their own needs aside so as to care for and support their wives seems to have opened up possibilities for these couples to transcend their suffering. Despite their ongoing difficulties, both couples continue for the most part to live their relationships hopefully and with an appreciation for how they have been able to struggle through difficult times together.

The phenomenological analysis reveals that within the milieu of their intimate relationships the two couples in this study were engaged in transforming self, other and relationship. The analysis suggested that the potential for personal and relational transformation is enhanced when couples are willing to care for the being and becoming of both self and other within their relationships. But more essentially, transformation seems to require both partners to embrace the trials of relational living as an existential opportunity for their own personal becoming. The couples in this study acknowledged that living alone or in a more comfortable relationship might have been easier. There was some reluctance to credit the anguish they have suffered with the transformations they have wrought. Nevertheless, the second husband in particular expressed his sense that there is a



spiritual dimension to how he and his wife have transcended the worst of their shared suffering and will potentially emerge as personally enriched human beings.

The findings show that, the wife of the first couple had come to believe that personal and interpersonal crises are the catalysts for human growth and transformation. Through having to face the crisis of her sexual abuse, she feels she has grown both personally and in her relationship with her husband. In her words, "sometimes it is only when you really fall apart that you can come together in a different form".

At the end of his interview, her husband expressed his concern that he might have given too much rein to his doubts and fears, thus over-stressing the negative aspects of their relationship. He felt he had insufficiently emphasized the mutuality of their intimate life together in which he appreciated that he and his wife both give and receive care and understanding. Earlier, he had expressed the conviction that they have been able to grow personally and professionally in a way that would not have been possible without each other. His optimism was revealed in his expressed belief that he and his wife share the wish to co-create a more joyful and intimate closeness in their relationship.

The second man was particularly euphoric in his sense of accomplishment. Initially, he viewed himself as responding to the call to care empathically and without thought for self. However, upon later reflection, he came to understand how caring

for his wife provided him with an existential opportunity to fulfill more of his own innate human potentialities. He acknowledges that their journey has been arduous but, he believes their travails have strengthened their relationship in ways perhaps not possible for couples who do not have traumatic pasts to contend with.

His wife speculated that if they had not had been working so hard to heal from the aftermath of her sexual abuse they might have led superficial lives, concerned with comfort and material acquisition, rather than the search for personal and spiritual transformation. Although presently suffering deeply, she finds hope in the fact that she and her husband have always found a way to struggle through difficulties together. Even in the midst of their present crisis, she reminds herself that they have chosen to battle on, rather than despairing and abandoning each other.

Despite the enormous difficulties they have had to face, these two exemplary couples are managing to preserve the essential structures of their relationships and struggle towards subjective and intersubjective transformation. The phenomenological analysis suggested that the path which skirts the potential disasters of relational implosion or explosion may be one of empathic mutual caring for the being and becoming of self, other and relationship, as manifested in ongoing dialogue, shared understanding, gritty determination not to give up, and intense love, respect and appreciation for the other as friend and lover.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter will be devoted to a dialogue between the findings of our phenomenological study and the existential-phenomenological and mainstream literature, as surveyed in the literature review chapter. Following this return to the literature, we will consider the clinical implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

### Return to the Literature

The unique findings of the study fundamentally extend beyond previous understandings of how the aftermath of child sexual abuse is lived in adult intimate relationships. For the most part, mainstream literature has considered the subjective experience of sexual abuse survivors and, to a far lesser extent, their partners. Guided by a natural sciences perspective, the focus of most previous research has been on the possible causal relationship between sexual abuse as an event in the past and the symptoms experienced by survivors as adults. This leaves the impression that the event, its psychological impact, the symptoms manifested by survivors, and the problems reported by partners are separate from each other and have an independent life of their own. The present study differs radically from this disjointed status of mainstream research. It goes beyond a categorization of symptomatology to reveal the dynamic interrelated structures of meanings inherent to how two couples

are presently living their intimate relationships in the aftermath of the wife having been sexually abused as a child.

Despite fundamental differences in approach, the phenomenological analysis of the subjective and intersubjective experiences of living with the aftermath of child sexual abuse was found to be partially congruent with attachment theory and with the writings of trauma theorists such as Briere (1992), Herman (1992) and van der Kolk (1987, 1996). Many similarities and some differences were found between our findings and the Traumagenic Dynamics Model of Child Sexual Abuse of Finkelhor and Browne (1985). This discussion will also show how the findings of our study relate to existential-phenomenological contributions which were previously reviewed. The section which follows will be organized in terms of the themes drawn from the situated structures for the participants in the study. Themes will be discussed in the order in which they were presented in the chapter devoted to thematic commonalities and variations.

The theme of living a life-world pervaded by embodied vulnerability, insecurity and fear was found to be an enduring one for the women in the study. The notion of living fearfully is taken up by Heidegger (1962) who has said of fear that it reveals "the entity as endangered and abandoned to itself" (p.180). Herman (1992) refers to the experience of traumatic events being "extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary adaptations to life" (p.33). She has written about the state of hyperarousal in

survivors of sexual abuse, which she defines as the physiological state of constantly anticipating danger whether or not the circumstances warrant this.

Finkelhor and Browne's (1985) fourth dynamic of "powerlessness or disempowerment" refers to the way in which the sexually abused child's needs were overruled. These co-authors hypothesize that the experience of disempowerment in childhood produces anxiety, chronic fear, and the anticipation of further abuse in adult survivors. Although expressed in the language of causality, this echoes the finding that the two women in this study live fearfully, always aware of the vulnerability of their bodies, and constantly anticipating catastrophe. As the second women stated, "The biggest issue in my life is security".

As reviewed previously, Morrow and Smith's (1988) study used a grounded theory approach to analyze interviews with 11 adult women survivors of child sexual abuse. Their analysis revealed two core categories of subjective phenomena experienced by these women: Being overwhelmed by feelings of threat and danger, and feeling helpless, powerless, and not in control. Most of the survivors they interviewed had experienced feelings of terror at times and all had experienced fear. These findings are congruent with our own.

Phenomenological studies on victimization and sexual abuse speak poignantly of the pervasive fearfulness lived by people who have been victimized. Fischer and Wertz (1979) write that being criminally victimized means being forced to live being the prey

of someone who is a predator. In the aftermath of the crime, victims struggle to regain a sense of control and agency by being hypervigilant, altering their habitual ways of going about in the world, and making elaborate efforts to ensure their safety. Cosgrove's (1987) phenomenological study of women who were raped revealed that for these women the world will never be the same again. There has been a radical alteration in self-other-world relationships in that their world is now perceived as full of lurking dangers in which others cannot be assumed to be benign, and the self is lived fearfully and as the object of the exploitative intent of others. Similarly, Hepburn's (1993) phenomenological study of men sexually molested as children revealed that, as boys, they had suffered a radical transformation in their taken-for-granted attunement to themselves, their friends and families, and their world. Their world was no longer a safe place which could be freely and unselfconsciously explored.

This analysis revealed that the theme of embodied suffering was being lived by the women in the study as pain which is always with them, sometimes overwhelmingly, at other times more removed. Both women accepted that the past can never be fully erased, but although one of them has experienced a lessening of embodied suffering over time, the other still struggles exhaustingly with the everyday painful intrusions of her past abuse.

Most of the major texts on child sexual abuse and its aftermath, which were cited in the literature review, devote a

substantial amount of space to listing, categorizing, and discussing the extensive problems reported by sexual abuse survivors (Briere, 1989; Courtois, 1988; Herman, 1992; Russell, 1986). Increasingly the clinical diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder is being given to sexual abuse survivors. This represents an improvement over previous tendencies to label them as having "masochistic personality disorders". But, as van der Kolk (1996) has pointed out, the diagnostic criteria of PTSD were derived mainly from the literature on survivors of circumscribed traumatic events such as the Holocaust, combat, and natural disasters. Herman (1992) contends that the diagnosis fails to account for the "the protean symptomatic manifestations" (p.119) seen in adults abused in childhood and in other victims who suffer prolonged and repeated trauma, e.g. hostages and kidnapping victims. The psychoanalytic writer Krystal (1984) earlier pointed out that psychic trauma cannot be understood purely in terms of the specifics of the trauma itself but must be considered in terms of "the psychic reality of the individual and how that person interpreted and reacted to the experience" (p.7).

In phenomenological research, the focus is on descriptions of the meanings of lived experience, and a conscious effort is made to avoid the traps inherent in the shorthand of symptom-labelling. Most of the key manifestations of embodied suffering described by the women in the study have been reported in the form of symptoms by mainstream researchers studying survivors of child sexual abuse. These include, for example, "flashbacks",

dissociation, anxiety, guilt, depression, fibro-myalgia, hypervigilance, and sexual problems. In this phenomenological study, however, themes of embodied suffering emerged holistically from descriptions of lived experience and revealed how embodied suffering is lived within intimate relationships by the couples studied.

A striking manifestation of embodied suffering described by the women in the study involves the ambivalent way in which they live their sexuality. Their fear of being sexually objectified is echoed by the sexually abused women in Cosgrove's (1987) phenomenological study who live with the enduring realization that their objectification "is possible at any moment" (p.96).

The findings of this study concur with Finkelhor and Browne's dynamic category of "traumatic sexualization". These authors claim that being sexually abused as a child violates normal development. This in turn leads to misconceptions and distortions about sexuality which can be manifested in adulthood as a lack of sexual desire, compulsive sexual behaviour, or sexual dysfunction. During the past fifteen years, mainstream empirical research into the long-term effects of child sexual abuse has focused on the prevalence and variety of sexual difficulties reported by survivors of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1989; Frawley, 1988; Gold, 1986; Jehu, 1989; Langmade, 1983; McCabe, 1989; Meiselman, 1979). It speaks powerfully to the tenacious ramifications of child sexual abuse that neither of the women in the study recall



suffering the kind of extensive, intrusive and brutal sexual abuse that many survivors report. What also needs to be kept in mind is that both women have worked hard at healing through psychotherapy. In addition, both of them are in safe loving relationships with men who have consciously put their own sexual needs aside, allowed their wives to be in control of love-making, and sought to behave in exactly opposite ways from the men who abused them.

The phenomenological analysis revealed the theme of tenuous-being-in-control and being-all-responsible to be paramount in the lived everyday existences of the two women in the study. As vulnerable children they had been divested of control and had felt powerless to stop their fathers from abusing them. The analysis suggested that they had created a structure for themselves in which they reversed their powerlessness and lack of control and tried to recreate order and predictability into their life-worlds by being-in-control. This finding relates to Finkelhor and Browne's fourth dynamic category--the child's experience of "powerlessness or disempowerment"--which these co-authors suggest is likely to lead, in adulthood, to increased need for control over others. Briere (1989) also refers to how survivors can become intensely invested in control as a reaction to their chronic feelings of helplessness.

As children, the women in the study experienced having their most basic needs for bodily safety violated by someone who should have been responsible for protecting them from harm. The

analysis suggested that, out of their devastating betrayal, these women have created for themselves a way of being in the world which stands in sharp contrast to the way they were treated by their fathers. Their devastating childhood experience has been transformed into a structure of being-all-responsible.

Phenomenologically, being-all-responsible is lived as exhaustingly taking care of everyone and everything within their life-worlds. Courtois (1988) has addressed what she calls "learned responsibility" in adult survivors, having noted the frequency with which they "almost automatically take care of others, often to an extreme degree and with disregard to (their) own needs" (p.224). Lifton (1988) has noted that survivors of trauma, in general, feel both weak and in special need of care and nurturance but also reject or resent help because it reminds them of their own vulnerability.

Object relations theorists postulate that a child who is victimized by a parent cannot endure the thought that it is the parent who is ruthless and evil (Shengold, 1979). The child's only viable option is to believe that it is her fault that she was abused and to hope that if she is very good and extremely responsible, she can earn the love and care she craves. Van der Kolk (1996) comments on the tendency of those traumatized as children to suffer from a profound sense of responsibility, not only for their own abuse, but for subsequent problems over which they had no control.

The theme of existential aloneness was found to be at the core of how the two women in this study were presently living the experience of having been sexually abused. Betrayed by their fathers and not protected by their mothers, these women were left feeling existentially alone. Hepburn (1993), noted in his phenomenological study the extreme loneliness and alienation of men who had been sexually abused as children. He found protective isolation to be a fundamental theme in the way they lived as adults.

Our findings concur with the suggestion by van der Kolk (1987) and Herman (1992) that the act of sexual abuse essentially ruptures attachment affiliation. It severs the child not only from the comfort of an internal image of secure attachment between self and other but also from the blind trust that there will be a real-life attachment figure to turn to in times of stress.

The findings from this study were enlightening in showing that both women had actively chosen mates who were unusually caring, responsible, and trustworthy men, ready and willing to be steady in their devotion and commitment to their wives. The women, in turn, relished and treasured their husbands for the loving understanding, availability, and support they offered. And yet, when they were feeling weak and vulnerable, neither of these women were able to turn to their husbands for comfort. This was the case when, for example, the first woman was feeling depleted and exhausted after the birth of her daughter, and when the

second began to fear that her husband might be trying to control and dominate her. The essence of secure intimate relationships is the feeling that one is lovable, and also that one feels comfortable about depending on others, ready to be emotionally close to them, and unafraid of being abandoned (Bartholomew, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, instead of turning to their husbands for reassurance when feeling threatened, as women who feel emotionally secure might have been able to do, the women in the study reverted to their terrifying feelings of being utterly alone and with no-one they could truly rely on. This seems to correspond with what Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have categorized as "fearful attachment". They use the term "fearful model of attachment" to describe adults who have negative working models of both self and other: They feel both that they themselves are unworthy and that others are untrustworthy.

Briere (1992), writing on the impact of child abuse in general, describes what he calls "disturbed relatedness" in adult survivors by which he means "ambivalence and fear regarding interpersonal attachment and vulnerability" (p.50). He considers that this results from the fact that the abuse occurred within the context of the child's first close attachment relationship. Alexander (1992) has suggested that incest survivors may retain "working models of relationships" which reflect their earlier insecure attachment patterns as abused children. She has hypothesized that insecure working models may need to be addressed if survivors are to have satisfactory intimate

relationships. Alexander, following Bowlby (1988), who suggested that a "corrective" relational experience might bring about a change in working models of self and other, has also suggested that the long-term effects of sexual abuse may be mediated by relationships which are supportive and nurturing.

The issue of betrayal was central to the experience of the women in the study. The second woman was particularly clear in stating that her father's betrayal of her trust was at the core of all her problems. She inferred from her experience that if fathers could abuse their own daughters, any man could be a sexual abuser. As a grown woman, she lived her embodied vulnerability always fearful in the presence of men and never fully trusting any of them again. Finkelhor and Browne's second dynamic of "betrayal" refers to the child's experience of being betrayed by being sexually abused by someone he or she has trusted or is vitally dependent upon. These authors postulate that the child no longer feels able to trust that close relationships are safe and, thereafter, generalizes to others his or her expectation of being betrayed.

The phenomenological analysis further revealed the implicit sense that these women felt not only betrayed by their fathers but also, somehow, by themselves. They knew that what their fathers had done was wrong, but, nevertheless, they lived their own self-doubt as to their personal responsibility for what happened. This is reminiscent of the more explicit findings in Hepburn's (1993) phenomenological study of men abused as

children. The men he interviewed were filled with self-doubt and guilt for having allowed themselves to be subjugated and taken advantage of, for not having fought off their abusers, and, worse still, for their feelings of sensual pleasure. Hepburn's analysis revealed that, as boys, they feared that other adults might abuse them. They also felt uncertain about their own intentions and desires and concerned that they might not be able to defend themselves in the future. It is significant that both Hepburn's analysis and our own add a new dimension to Finkelhor and Browne's model. It seems that the dynamic of "betrayal" is more complex than portrayed by these authors. Phenomenological analysis suggests that sexual abuse by a trusted other may be experienced not only as betrayal by another, but also as a more fundamental betrayal and subsequent self-loathing and mistrust of self.

Reflection upon the way in which the women in the study described how their abusive pasts regularly re-invaded their presents revealed a compellingly repetitive cycle or pattern to the way this is lived. Many mainstream authors (Herman, 1992; Horowitz, 1986; van der Kolk, 1989) refer to predictable and repetitive ways in which people respond to traumatic events. Kardiner (1941) noted that, once traumatized, a person will act at times "as if the original traumatic situation were still in existence and engage in protective devices which failed on the original occasion" (p.82). Van der Kolk (1989) describes what he calls a "trauma re-enactment cycle" in which "victims of trauma

respond to contemporary stimuli as if the trauma had returned, without conscious awareness that past injury rather than current stress is the basis of their physiologic emergency responses" (p.396).

The cyclical pattern of dynamically interrelated themes capturing the path of feelings from the past abuse, as they re-invade and retreat in the lives of the women in the study, has not been explicated in the literature. Freud (1896/1962) postulated that repetitions or behavioral re-enactments of past behaviours enabled people to gain mastery over past trauma, but current clinical experience indicates that repetition merely causes further suffering (van der Kolk, 1996). Understanding the patterned way in which the past is being lived in the present has obvious clinical significance in that it opens up possibilities for loosening the tightly repetitive nature of the cycle. This may then begin to take on the form of an ever-expanding spiral implying healthier and more relaxed ways of living with the past.

As was noted in the literature review, mainstream academic researchers have, as yet, paid very little attention to the experience of the partners of sexual abuse survivors. There have been some reports on support groups conducted for partners (Brittain & Merriam, 1988; Chauncey, 1994; Cohen, 1988; Jehu, 1989). In addition, a few studies which primarily examine the relationships of sexual abuse survivors, have included the responses of partners (Reid, 1993, Waltz, 1993). The popular press has made up for this gap in the academic literature with a

flurry of self-help books in the past few years (Davis, 1991; Gil, 1991; Graber, 1991). These works are largely concerned with educating men as to the long-term effects of child sexual abuse, how to help in the healing process of their partners, and how to take care of their own needs, given the expectation that there will be many times when their survivor-partners will barely be able to take care of themselves, let alone take care of anyone else.

In the phenomenological analysis of the thematic way in which the two men in the study were living with the aftermath of the wives' early sexual abuse, three dialectically related themes emerged: Caring, feeling-controlled, and putting-aside-of-self and restriction-of-life-world. The theme of caring was found to be preeminent in the relational experience of the men in this study. As referred to earlier, the human capacity to respond to the "call to care" was first elaborated by Heidegger (1962/1926) who considered it to be foundational to human existence. Within our human interrelatedness, Heidegger considers caring to mean nurturing the being and becoming of both self and other. In his view, it is in responding to the call to care that we reveal ourselves to be authentically human. The situated structures revealed that the men in the study were quite exemplary in their gentleness, understanding, and willingness to care for their wives. In their turn, the men felt for the most part cared for and cherished by their wives, who, during the couple interviews, amply expressed their appreciation for the loving support they



had received.

Both the women in the study described previous intimate relationships which were either abusive or in which their needs had not been taken into account. Mainstream researchers have frequently noted the tendency of women who have suffered sexual abuse as children to find themselves in relationships which replicate, in some ways, the pattern of their earlier abuse (Briere, 1984; Jehu, 1989; Katz, 1988; Russell, 1986). However, no specific experimental or clinical research was found which considers the ability of sexual abuse survivors to break out of patterns of abusive relationships and consciously choose partners who are unlikely to abuse them. Neither has there been any clinical research which examines the transformative role played by partners, such as those in this study, who are capable and willing to respond to the call to care.

As reviewed in more depth in the review of the literature, four clinical reports were found which describe the outcome of support groups for the partners of sexual abuse survivors. It is of interest to this study that the partners described in these four accounts appeared to be of two different types: Men who were prepared to put their own needs aside temporarily so as to care for their wives, and men who were not. Brittain and Merriam (1988), for example, distinguished two separate types amongst the 31 male partners in the three groups they ran. They found a small number of partners who wanted to improve their relationships, were committed to their marriages, and were

genuinely interested in learning how to increase intimacy and foster mutual caring. These men sound somewhat similar to the two men in this study. Similarly, Cohen (1988) and Chauncey (1994), reported that many of their group members showed considerable empathy and understanding for their survivor-partners. Over time, the men in Cohen's group expressed apprehension but also excitement about "the prospect of being different from their own fathers in the areas of expressing emotion, closeness to their children, supportiveness of their wives' assertiveness, and empathy" (p.97).

However, Brittain and Merriam (1988) also reported that the majority of the partners they worked with were limited in their ability to benefit from the group experience. They described this second type of men as "troubled individuals who felt entitled to the exclusive attention and concern of their survivor-partners, and came to the group hoping to learn ways to make the survivors better meet their own needs" (p.100).

Likewise, Jehu (1989) reported that some of the men he studied were acting abusively towards their partners, and others were considered by the group leader to be "overly dependent" upon the survivor and primarily focused on getting their own needs met. The women in this study described previous relationships with men who, speculatively, seem to have had something in common with the less caring men described above.

For the men in this phenomenological study, the theme of caring was dialectically related to the theme of feeling-

controlled by their wives. The theme of feeling-controlled was seen to be a response to living with wives who were ensuring a tenuous level of safety for themselves by being-in-control and all-responsible in their life-worlds. Neither of the men in the study openly complained about feeling controlled, as such, but talked rather of feeling "crowded", "shut out", excluded from joint decision-making about parenting, "criticized", "mistrusted", dragged into riding "an emotional roller coaster" with their wives, at the mercy of their wives "angry outbursts", and compelled to wait for their wives to decide when and how love-making should take place.

Most of the feelings hinted at, or openly expressed, by the men in the study were echoed by the men in the partner support groups of Cohen (1988) and Chauncey (1994) which were discussed above. Like the men in this study, the partners in Chauncey's group talked about their wives need for predictability. They felt they were "walking on eggshells" and found it difficult to act spontaneously and naturally with their mates.

Overall, the men in this study were unusually optimistic and positive in their descriptions of their relational life. The first man was quite reluctant to admit to any pessimistic feelings and tended to quickly follow any negative statement with a positive one, as if he felt guilty about talking about his own suffering. Chauncey reported that, at times, the men in her group were painfully aware that their own needs were not being met and this left them feeling irritated and resentful. But,

like the first man in our study, they tended to feel guilty and ashamed of their resentful feelings. One of the men said:

Sometimes I feel so resentful - what about my life? It's a little like having your wife get sick and end up bedridden. You have to do all the work. But what can you do? You can't blame them. It's not their fault. (p.672)

The theme of putting-aside-of-self and restriction of life-world emerged from the phenomenological analysis and was found to be dialectically related to the themes of caring and feeling-controlled in the lives of the two men in our study. This relates to the clinical finding by Chauncey that the single most frequent theme expressed by the men in her group was "how to balance the partner's own needs for attention, nurturance or autonomy and the wish or need to help the survivor" (p.671). Group members frequently felt guilty for doing or saying things that seemed to add to the survivor's suffering as well as shame for having needs and feelings of their own.

All the partners in Chauncey's group expressed feelings of hurt, sadness, helplessness, and longing for more emotional and physical closeness in their relationships. This was congruent with the experience of the first man in the study. He was feeling depleted, but found it difficult to express both his sadness and his resentment that his wife had been emotionally and physically withdrawn from him during the past few years. In her book, The Sexual Healing Journey, Maltz (1988) discussed the emotional concerns of partners and concluded that essentially

these had to do with feelings of profound rejection. Like the first man in the study, the men she worked with often felt sad or resentful about the loss of physical closeness in their relationships. Like the second man in the study, they also felt pain at being the ones to trigger incest memories and associations. Similarly, Waltz (1993) observed that the interactions of couples where the woman was a sexual abuse survivor were marked by sadness, especially when talking about sex, and she suggested that both partners were experiencing a sense of loss around this issue.

Maltz (1988) has described a process of what she calls "vicarious victimization" which is reminiscent of how the second man in the study described embodying some of his wife's pain and terror during love-making. His natural pleasure in sex had, at times, been curtailed by images of incestuous sex which erupted into his awareness during love-making. Like many of the men whose experience is reported in the literature, the men in our study talked about having to constantly monitor their behaviour so as not to frighten or upset their wives. This is particularly apparent in the distress they express about the reduced possibility of enjoying a free and spontaneous sexual relationship with their wives.

Limited as it is, the clinical literature on partners of sexual abuse survivors, and particularly the work of Cohen (1988), Maltz (1988) and Chauncey (1994) was found to echo our findings. However, these authors tend to describe, as discrete

entities, the issues raised by men who are partners of sexual abuse survivors. The contribution of this research project is the discovery of a powerful dialectical relationship between predominant themes which are lived intersubjectively as a structural unity by the two men in our study.

In the thematic analysis section of the results, we elaborated upon the matrix of subjective and intersubjective themes which emerged for the two couples in this study. These will be discussed in the light of the three studies, previously reviewed, which specifically investigated the relationships of women sexual abuse survivors from the perspective of both partners.

In Reid's (1993) qualitative study of 17 couples, many of the issues spontaneously raised by the couples he interviewed were also touched upon by our couples. However, Reid identified one problem area common to the couples in his study which he labelled "dysfunctional communication patterns". Contrary to Reid's finding, the couples in our study particularly valued the open, honest, and self-revealing way in which they could talk to each other as they would with close friends. All the participants in the project felt this to be a critical strength in their relationships and one of the primary ways in which problems were resolved between them.

As reviewed earlier, Waltz (1993) investigated the long-term effects of child sexual abuse on women's relationships with their partners and found that couples revealed lower levels of

emotional expressiveness and increased sadness, when compared with controls, especially when they were talking about sexuality. She also noted that these couples were not as critical, sarcastic, blaming, or denying of personal responsibility as might have been predicted given the level of their marital distress as measured on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The results of Waltz' study cannot be directly related to our study because the two couples in our study did not report significant levels of distress (as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, see Appendix B). Furthermore, her empirical study falls into the characteristic nomothetic trap of mainstream research in that it looks at sexual abuse survivors and their partners as a group and quantifies the complexity of their emotional expressiveness. Nevertheless, Waltz' findings are interesting and do not conflict with our findings.

In the third study reviewed, McCollum (1993) used a qualitative multiple case study research approach to consider the effect of child sexual abuse upon the marriages of four survivor clients and their partners. He concluded that healing from sexual abuse alters not only the survivor's individual identity "but also the foundation of marital relationships, demanding not just a reformulation of individual identity but of relational identity as well" (p.35). This finding is interesting and concurs with what Lifton (1988) has said about the ultimate task of trauma survivors being a "task of reformulation".

Three of the participants in the study were powerfully aware that their potential for personal and relational transformation had been enhanced through the struggle to heal their wounds from the past. The second couple, in particular, expressed the sense that, despite their anguish, they had been spared from living superficial, mundane and materialistic lives. There are echoes here of Heidegger's contention, in Being and Time (1962/1926), that there are two fundamental modes of existing in the world: a state of forgetfulness of being or a state of mindfulness of being. To live in a state of forgetfulness of being means that one lives in the world of things, immersed in "idle chatter" and the diversions of daily life. To live in a state of mindfulness of being, on the other hand, requires one to be mindful not only of the fragility of being but also that one is responsible for one's own being and has the power to change oneself.

Merleau-Ponty in The Structure of Human Behaviour (1963) refers to the unique ability of human beings, in dialectical relationship with their milieu, not only to actively create structures of behaviour but also to transcend and transform these structures. Our empirical-phenomenological research findings make a significant contribution by revealing how the two couples we studied have been able to celebrate what they have accomplished together and to recognize that only within their intimate relationships would they have been able to transcend much of the pain of the past and move toward personal and relational transformation.



The significance and richness of our findings justifies the use of a discovery-oriented phenomenological methodology for investigating the nature of the lived experience of such subjective and intersubjective phenomena as living the aftermath of child sexual abuse within an intimate relationship. The discovery of meaningful patterns of dialectically or responsively lived themes which emerged through the phenomenological analysis extends fundamentally and provocatively beyond previous understandings. This has implications, not only for relationships where one or both partners have suffered from childhood trauma, but for couple relationships in general.

### Clinical Implications

This research project has fulfilled its purpose by extending our horizons of understanding about what it means to live in an intimate relationship with the aftermath of child sexual abuse. Within the comparative safety of their intimate relationships, the couples in the study were together engaged in opening up their experiential worlds and sharing their growing understanding of themselves and of each other. Generously, they allowed the researcher to enter their life-worlds, and thus opened up the possibility that through a phenomenological analysis, she too would approach a deeper understanding of what it means for a couple to live with the aftermath of child sexual abuse.

As an existential-phenomenological study, our findings have immediate relevance for the practice of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. Psychological research and psychotherapy, when grounded in existential-phenomenological philosophy, share the primary aim of understanding the meaning structures of subjective and intersubjective lived experience. Like the phenomenological researcher, the psychotherapist seeks to enter the world of his or her clients and strives to understand their perceived meanings and how each client relates to self, other, and world.

Reflecting upon the praxis of psychotherapy, Mook (1987a) has referred to the phenomenological therapist's experience as "being-there, sensing, hearing and understanding" (p.21).

Describing her own experience as a therapist, she writes:

In being-there, I begin to sense and hear what is implicitly present but out of my client's field of awareness. I begin to sense the presence of a hidden realm from which he/she has fled and does not yet wish to know. Together with my client, we seek to reveal the concealed truths of his/her existence (p.24).

Applying Gadamer, Mook (1991) describes how a new and expanded horizon of understanding is born between the therapist and the client which goes beyond either of their previous horizons of understanding. She contends that it is in the mutual grasping and communication of this expanded understanding, within the context of a trusting therapeutic relationship, that healing

and growth take place. In Mook's (1987a) words, compassionate understanding "increases openness and receptivity towards self and others and promotes, integration, growth and well-being" (p.25) Furthermore, she finds that the communication of understanding enables suffering individuals to begin to shake off the repetitively lived patterns of the past in which they have been ensnared, and begin to live more freely.

Going beyond the particular commonalities between existential-phenomenological research and psychotherapy, the findings of this study have relevance for humanistic/experiential psychotherapies generally. These therapeutic approaches have been inspired by existential-phenomenological philosophy and they stress the importance of understanding the everyday, concrete lived experience of clients. As in a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy described by Mook (1987a), humanistic and/or experiential therapists also aim to help clients change the conflictual relatedness in which they are living with themselves and others, and to break free of repetitive, self-destructive patterns of interaction, liberate their potential to live more freely, and "discover new pathways of meaningful relatedness to others" (Mook, 1987a, p.22).

The study speaks directly to the vital significance and healing power of being in a safe relationship if one is suffering from the aftermath of child sexual abuse. This is consistent with Herman's (1992) statement that, for sexual abuse survivors, recovery can occur "only within the context of relationships, it

cannot occur in isolation" (p.134). The first woman in the study is convinced that true and lasting healing can only take place within an intimate relationship, such as hers, because only with a loved and trusted other can all the fears from the past and the hidden and discounted aspects of self be safely revealed. The second woman expressed her gratitude toward her husband for sensing that her explosive rages were really a cover for her fear and vulnerability. His ability to grasp what is outside her own awareness has helped her understand herself better. She states:

I think if I hadn't met H, or been still with my former for that matter, I don't think the past would have been brought forward to be taken care of. H gave me the space to work in, to work it out. For some reason, I feel safety. I think that's why it did come out, because I did feel safe.

The research findings speak potently to the importance of integrating couples therapy with individual therapy for couples where one partner is a survivor of child sexual abuse. The second woman expressed a strong need for couple counselling, saying that despite all the work she has done in individual and group counselling, the most painful and difficult times are presently those in which her past abuse erupts into her intimate relationship with her husband. The first woman in the study had reflected deeply upon her relational life with her previous lovers. She had a profound understanding of the ways in which her husband was different from them and of the ways in which she, in turn, had changed and grown through being with him. Yet,

while engaged in this research project, she also began to be aware of how ironic it was that his caring and respectful way of making love with her may have indirectly contributed to her loss of sexual desire for him. She began to have a clearer idea of the work that they needed to do together to revitalize their intimate relationship.

As previously discussed, Johnson (1989) has strongly advocated integrating couple therapy with an individual approach in working with sexual abuse survivors. Johnson contends that "emotional reactivity and blocks arising from the past incestuous experience exhibit themselves most powerfully in present intimate interactions and in this context become explicit and accessible to change" (p.97)

Understanding the matrix of interrelated meanings which emerged from this study, should greatly enhance the work of both individual and couple therapists. The phenomenological analysis speaks specifically to how critical it is for all concerned to understand the patterned way in which child sexual abuse can be lived within adult intimate relationships. For example, when the second husband learned that his wife's excessive and irrational rages probably meant she was re-living some interpersonal trauma from her past, he was able to avoid being drawn into an argument with her and to reach out to comfort her instead. His compassionate response enabled her to soften toward him and to become more clearly aware of what was really troubling her. Once the therapist's own comprehension has been expanded,

he or she should more easily be able to facilitate clients' emergent understanding of what deeper fears and feelings may lurk behind one partner's repetitive, self-protecting patterns of behaviour.

The dilemma of how to find a balance between caring for the being and becoming of the self and the other in intimate relationships, was a prominent one in our study and has important implications for couple therapy in general. Couple therapists will need to work toward helping clients find a balance acceptable to both partners, particularly where one partner has an explicit and poignant claim to be cared for because of past or present suffering. The ideal of full mutuality is one to strive toward, but is probably rarely achieved. However, the survival of an intimate relationship can be seriously endangered where there is a radical imbalance, either in an over-emphasis on self at the expense of other, or on the other at the expense of self. Likewise, when one or both partners concentrate their energies on the "becoming" aspect of their lives and demand an extreme degree of autonomy, or devote most of their time to pursuing their personal goals at the expense of couple goals, the being-in-relationship which is expressed as closeness and intimacy can be jeopardized. It could also be argued that the opposite pattern contains a different risk--too heavy an emphasis on closeness in an intimate relationship can lead to stultification and relational atrophy.

The couples studied were powerfully aware of the evolving nature of their ongoing relational journey. The first woman and the second man were particularly articulate in expressing how they had been personally transformed by their struggle to heal within their mutual relationships. One was a highly educated woman and the other a technical repairman, however, both were unusually attuned to the temporal unfolding and interface of past, present, and future in their lived experience and were able to express considerable excitement about what they had been able to accomplish so far. Talking about his marital relationship, the second man said, somewhat euphorically:

As challenging as it is, it is rewarding. So if you're up to it then it will change your life. Where there was pain, you will make love and that's a wonderful feeling. That is very advanced living. Like we're inching towards wisdom.

Too often, the current self-help literature merely speaks about how partners of sexual abuse survivors can be helpmates in the healing process. Our study goes beyond this in suggesting that in such challenging relationships, partners' come face to face with their own existential possibilities for personal transformation. The clinical implications of this finding point toward helping partners understand that this possibility for themselves is one which they can either seize or ignore.

The findings of this phenomenological research project speak to the importance of helping sexual abuse survivors and their partners sustain and foster healing relationships. Despite a

high level of commitment and generally positive feelings about each other and their marriages, both couples in our study were experiencing difficulties. The second wife was going through a crisis of trust and was wondering whether it might be better for everyone concerned if she took her daughter and went off on her own. The first husband had been questioning how long he could continue to endure his wife's loss of sexual desire and reduced emotional engagement in their relationship. The implications of these findings are that both these couples could have benefitted from a couples therapy approach designed to bolster their courage, and help strengthen their relationships through understanding how better to weather the ongoing intrusions from the past.

#### Limitations of the Research Study

This is an existential-phenomenological study which seeks to answer questions of meaning. Phenomenological research is descriptive and not explanatory. As Van Manen (1990) has pointed out, "phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalizations, the production of law-like statements, or the establishment of functional relationships" (p. 22). Rather, phenomenology is ever mindful of the uniqueness of human experience. The purpose of phenomenological psychological research is to articulate the invariant meaning-structures embedded in a particular lived human experience and to expand our understanding of this phenomenon.



This expanded understanding can be communicated to others, and, in this way, has general applicability beyond the individual cases studied.

The findings of this research project surpassed our expectations. Nevertheless, within the parameters of phenomenological research, there were some limitations to the study which need to be addressed. These limitations have to do with the selection of subjects, the timing of the research interviews, the difficulty in obtaining the written protocols, and the volume of data and time required to analyze it. The question of the completeness of the data also needs to be discussed.

It proved to be quite difficult to find couples who met the criteria for this study, who were articulate, and who felt emotionally strong enough to talk about their intimate relationships. Some might consider it a limitation of the project that all of the subjects interviewed were comparatively non-distressed, in terms of their level of marital satisfaction as reported on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (See Appendix B). However, the project was specifically designed to look at relationships which were reasonably stable, on the assumption that participants would more likely feel secure enough to talk openly about their life-worlds with a stranger if they were not experiencing acute relational distress. Had one or more of the subjects been reporting a significant level of marital distress, it is possible that the findings of this study might have been

somewhat different. Both the women interviewed spontaneously reported that if they had been approached to take part in a project like this while they were in any of their previous relationships, they would have been far too distressed to consider being involved. This issue will be taken up further in the section devoted to directions for future research below.

All the couples selected to participate in the study had young children who required baby-sitting when both parents were absent. In light of this, all three couples initially interviewed expressed a preference for combining the brief initial meeting with the joint research interview rather than having to meet twice. This meant that participants responded to the research question orally and in each other's presence, before responding to it privately and in writing. The researcher felt some concern about deviating from the proposed and customary procedure in this way. There was no way of knowing what difference this would make to the quality of the data obtained. However, a decision had to be made on the spur of the moment and precedence was given to the expressed needs of the research subjects.

Close examination of the interview data from the joint interviews revealed that these may have served the function of opening up the lived experience of the phenomenon in a safe and non-threatening way, with perhaps each partner's more positive perceptions of their relational life being given in this more public forum. Later, the individual subjects were able to write

and talk about their subjective and intersubjective experience in a deeply personal and often less positive and optimistic way. Participants spontaneously reported feeling safe and listened to after the joint interview, and it is possible that this freed them to be more revealing in their written protocols than if they had not first had this experience. Methodologically, it might have been preferable for the subjects to have had the chance to first respond in writing to the research question. However, the richness of the data leads us to hope that the meanings of the lived experience of the phenomena were well captured, despite the order of the written and oral expressions.

Although subjects were requested to return their written protocols within two weeks, each of the women took about a month to do this, and the men took even longer. One of them completed his protocol just before he was interviewed which gave the researcher only half an hour to read and reflect upon what he had written before the interview. All subjects reported that it had been very difficult for them to get down to writing about their experience and they much preferred being interviewed. Written protocols were very variable in quality and length and, in our opinion, would not have provided rich enough data for the research project without the addition of extensive interviews.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, Mook (1983) has raised questions about the problems of obtaining written descriptions which sufficiently articulate lived experience. In her words, the addition of dialogical interviewing "endorses the

phenomenological reality of our intentional subjective-intersubjective relatedness and sees the phenomenon as manifesting itself in the realm of the in-between" (p.9-10). In this particular study where the phenomenon being researched was a deeply painful and difficult one, the use of dialogical interviews was found to have been essential.

Phenomenological analysis, although a fascinating and profoundly rewarding process is, undoubtedly, extremely time-consuming. This can be a problem in a situation where there are time restraints for completing a project. Transforming the transcribed data into meaning units and writing the situated structures for the first two couples took so long that a decision had to be made to exclude the data obtained from the third couple from analysis. Nevertheless, it was felt that the results already obtained were ample for the purpose of fully articulating the phenomenon being researched. It is an accepted practice of qualitative research that the researcher only obtains data until what is in hand is necessary and sufficient to fully articulate the phenomenon or, in other words, until the law of diminishing returns applies (Kvale, 1994).

One of the most critical and demanding aspects of this research project was the actual process of conducting the dialogical interview. The method requires that the phenomenon be allowed to reveal itself implicitly and explicitly in a naturally unfolding manner. For the most part, the researcher asked general or open-ended questions but kept the focus on the

research question. Where necessary to clarify a meaning or help participants elaborate on their experience, direct or leading questions were deliberately asked. Although some may consider that this limits the reliability of the data, Kvale (1987) has pointed out that in qualitative research, too often, the researcher's reluctance to guide the interview by asking some leading questions results in excessively long, unwieldy and discursive interviews. He suggests that an examination of the transcript should be sufficient to establish whether the interviewer's leading question helped the subject to open up a deeper level of awareness or whether it inappropriately "fed" an response to the subject.

It is inevitable in phenomenological research, that researchers will have a sense of incompleteness about all that is still hidden or unknown. Just as the data is inevitably incomplete, so the findings from this study are accepted as partial. In psychological phenomenological research, we can only aim toward a partial reduction, not toward the full phenomenological reduction which, in philosophical studies, strives towards the transcendental notion of capturing the essential eidos of the phenomenon. The aim of phenomenological psychological research is not to "know" in order to be able to generalize. Findings are not held dogmatically. They are judged by whether they yield an expanded understanding of the phenomenon and open up new possibilities for dialogue which may lead in turn to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon. The

phenomenological researcher honours the tentative nature of all understanding and never assumes to have "acquired" knowledge that can, thereafter, readily be applied to other comparable situations.

### Directions for Future Research

The findings of this project have satisfactorily demonstrated the usefulness of an empirical-phenomenological research approach for studying the interrelated dynamic structures of the meanings inherent in how two couples are presently living their intimate relationships in the aftermath of the wife having been sexually abused as a child. However, the limitations of the study, discussed above, speak to the need for further work on refining the phenomenological method for use with couples. Ground-breaking work has been done in using an empirical-phenomenological approach to research the lived experience of family members. Recent phenomenological studies of families include one on the phenomenon of scapegoating (Mook, 1985), and others where a family member was depressed (Mook, 1987), or anorexic (Emmrys, 1993) or head-injured (Clark, 1995). However, phenomenological research into couple relationships is still in its infancy. Further research into the subjective and intersubjective lived experience of couples, for example, where one of them has been incapacitated by illness or where a child has died, would provide opportunities for refining the interview

and research procedures used in this study.

More work needs to be done on the method of conducting research interviews, particularly when the phenomenon is one where emergent or hidden awareness may require the help of a skilled and sensitive clinician if it is to be given verbal expression. It would also be interesting to explore questions about the number of interviews optimal for obtaining an adequate as opposed to an overwhelming amount of data. Another possibility would be to conduct follow-up interviews either shortly after the research interview or after the analysis of the data so as to explore the meaning of the research experience for the participants (Giorgi, 1971).

Given the structural unity of the matrix of subjective and intersubjective themes revealed for the couples in this phenomenological study, it would be interesting to explore how this structure would be altered or conserved under different conditions. How might the structure of the phenomenon be different if the relational experience was lived differently, for instance if the men involved were less willing or able to respond to the call to care? We have seen that Jehu (1989) and Brittain and Merriam (1988) reported on men in their groups who seemed to be primarily focused on getting their survivor-partners to attend to their own pressing physical, emotional, and sexual needs. It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up phenomenological study of at least one couple where the man was unable or unwilling to respond to the call to care.

Another area of exploration could involve how the structural unity of the phenomenon would be altered or conserved if the couples studied were significantly different from the couples in our study. For example, one might conduct a study of the same phenomenon with one or more couples who were significantly distressed and dissatisfied by their relationships. Another direction for phenomenological research might be to investigate the experience of couples where both partners had been sexually abused, or where it was the man who had been sexually abused rather than the woman, or where both partners were of the same sexual orientation, or where one or both partners were from cultural backgrounds with different societal norms about intimate relationships and sexual abuse. At this time, one can only imagine what similarities and variations would be found between the matrices of subjective and intersubjective themes for couples who are living with the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse but differ in some way from the two couples in our present study.

When it comes to research specifically directed towards understanding how child sexual abuse is lived within adult intimate relationships, this study points to some avenues for further phenomenological as well as mainstream psychological exploration. How women who have been sexually abused in childhood find meaning in the past so as to consciously break out of self-destructive relational patterns has not, hitherto, been explicitly elaborated or investigated in the literature. In addition, more needs to be known about the transformative role



played by partners, such as those in our study, who are willing to put aside their own needs temporarily in order to respond to the call to care for another.

In conclusion, this discovery-orientated phenomenological approach has provided us with a way of researching the lived experience of couples trying to weather the aftermath of child sexual abuse within their intimate relationships. The understandings gleaned from this study lend depth to what has previously been known about how child sexual abuse is lived in adult relationships and these understandings have clear implications for clinical practice and future research. In addition, it was apparent that the participants did not feel used or objectified, but instead reported that they had benefitted from being involved in this dialogical research process. They spontaneously expressed their appreciation for being able to explore their feelings about their relational experience in a way that opened up new awareness and understanding for them.

For this researcher, the experience of engaging in this phenomenological research project has been personally transforming. Unlike the research method of the natural sciences model, where human experience is for the most part objectified or ignored, the phenomenological method is a participatory one and is closely related to the practice of psychotherapy. In a project like this, the phenomenological researcher, like the therapist, strives to put aside assumptions, enters the experiential lived-world of others, searches for the felt meaning

implicit in concrete everyday language, and shares in the communication of a newly expanded understanding which reaches beyond the previous awareness of all involved. To have had this opportunity as part of one's professional education and training feels like a gift and a privilege.

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## Appendix A

## RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am interested in participating in a study being conducted by Jan de Crespigny M.A., a doctoral student who is the primary investigator, and Professor Bertha Mook Ph.D., her thesis supervisor, both of whom are affiliated with the School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa. The purpose of this study is to better understand what it is like for two people to be in an intimate relationship when one of the partners is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

If I agree to participate, my involvement will consist of first completing a screening questionnaire which pertains to my view of my relationship. This should take me about ten minutes. I will then be asked to provide a written description of what it has been like for me to live in this relationship with my partner. I will be given a research question, asking me to be as concrete and descriptive as possible in giving examples of my lived experience. I will have a week to do this in a place of my choosing and I understand that this written description is to be from one to three pages in length.

The primary investigator will also interview me, once together with my partner and once on my own. These interviews will each take approximately one hour and will be audiotaped. The purpose of these interviews will be to provide me with an opportunity to expand upon and clarify aspects of my experience so as to assist the primary investigator in more fully understanding what my everyday life with my partner has been like. These interviews will take place at the University of Ottawa. I understand that since this research deals with personal matters, discussing my experience may evoke uncomfortable or distressing feelings but that the interviewer will make every effort to be supportive of my wishes and feelings at such times.

The researchers assure me that the information I will share will only be used for research purposes and will remain strictly confidential. That is, the researchers will not divulge to either my partner or me, at any time, any information from the screening instrument, our written descriptions or the individual interviews. Only the investigators of this project will have access to this information. To ensure my anonymity, a pseudonym will be used, instead of my name, on all data. The research material may be used for publication purposes, but only after all names and identifying references have been changed to protect my privacy.

I give my consent for the recording of the interview on audiotape, with the understanding that the contents will only be used for research purposes and in respect of confidentiality. Only the investigators of this project will have access to the audiotapes, which will be erased upon completion of the study. I understand that in reporting the findings of this study, content from my descriptions may be quoted, but only after names and identifying information have been changed to ensure anonymity.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate in this study without penalty. I am also free to refuse to answer certain questions and to withdraw from this study at any time.

I understand that, in order to further protect my confidentiality, it will be my responsibility to contact my regular therapist/counsellor or support group (where I have one) in case I should feel the need for any additional emotional support while taking part in the study, or to contact any of the sources of support on the attached list (Service Options) if I feel this could be of benefit to me.

Questions regarding the research project itself should be directed to Jan de Crespigny at (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* or Dr. Bertha Mook at (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\*.

I have read the above information, understand it, and agree to participate in the study. There are two copies of this consent form one of which is mine to keep.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESSED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

OPTIONAL: I wish to receive a summary of the findings of this study, which will be available at the end of 1996, to be mailed to me at the following address:

\_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE KEEP ONE COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

## Appendix B

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ASSESSMENT DATA  
FOR THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

## Couple No. 1

Background InformationWife

38 years old. W1 comes from an academic family. She is highly educated and has obtained two Master's degrees, the second in Counselling. She has worked as a social researcher and community developer. She met her husband in the winter of 1987, when they were both in graduate school. They were married in 1990. At that time, she had had one previous common-law relationship which lasted for ten years and had been in another long-term relationship for several years. There were no children from these relationships. The couple has two children - a son aged 3 1/2 and a daughter aged one. Sexual abuse started when she was about three and stopped at puberty. It involved fondling and mutual masturbation. She had spent two years in individual therapy before she met her husband and felt that she had resolved many of her personal issues around the abuse. At the time she was interviewed, she had just completed a graduate degree in counselling and was herself counselling survivors of sexual abuse.

Husband

34 years old. He has a Ph.D. in Physics. He had been in two long term relationships before his marriage, one which lasted two years and one which lasted five. There were no children from these relationships. His wife told him about having been sexually abused as a child on the first occasion that they were sexually intimate together. He was brought up in a family where there was virtually no conflict. He had never experienced physical, emotional or sexual abuse and had never sought counselling.

Assessment ResultsDyadic Adjustment Scale

Scores: Wife: 104; Husband 114; Couple: 109.

None of these scores fall within the distressed range and the Husband's score is close to the mean for happily married couples (114.5). The Wife endorsed items indicating that she confides in her husband "most of the time", that she has "never" considered leaving him, that she is "a little unhappy" in her relationship, but that she "wants very much for it to succeed and will do her fair share to see that it does". The Husband indicated that he confides in his wife "all the time", that he has "rarely"

considered leaving his wife, that he is "extremely happy" in his relationship, and that he "wants very much for it to succeed and will do all he can to see that it does".

## Couple No.2

### Background Information

#### Wife

32 years old. She is a full-time mother with a three and a half year-old daughter. Her husband's ten year-old daughter from his previous marriage spends weekends with them. W2 has been in this intimate relationship for five years and the couple got married in November 1993. Her previous marriage lasted two years, although she and her first husband lived together for six years prior to this. She described this relationship as "very bad" and "abusive". Before her first marriage, she had had two long term relationships lasting about a year each. She has supported herself in the past by working as a clerk. She was sexually abused by her father and is clear about incidents occurring when she was eleven or twelve but she has very few early memories and some vague feelings that the abuse may have started earlier. As far as she is aware, the abuse consisted of fondling but not intercourse and stopped when she left home at fifteen. At the time she was interviewed, she had had three years of therapy to deal with the abuse, first in individual therapy and then in a long-term support group. She was currently seeing a counselor with whom she felt very comfortable.

#### Husband

38 years old. H2 works as a technical repairman. He was previously married for ten years to the woman who is the mother of his ten year-old daughter. Before this he had had one common-law relationship. When he became involved with W2 he knew that she had been abused by her previous husband, but it was not until she started having flashbacks about four months later that she told him she had been sexually abused by her father. He considers himself to have been emotionally abused as a child. His parents were alcoholics and his physically violent father left home before he entered adolescence. He feels his mother used him "as a crutch", relying on him for comfort and emotional support and calling him her "little Jesus". He reports that he was a very good child. He sometimes wonders if he may have been sexually abused by an aunt about whom he has some uncomfortable feelings. He had been in individual therapy previously, had twice been diagnosed as depressed, and was currently on medication for depression and in therapy with a new individual therapist. While he reported feeling that his own suffering in childhood helped him respond empathically to his wife, there were also times when he was, as he put it, dealing with his "own

demons" and unable to be supportive of her.

### Assessment Results

#### Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Scores: Wife - 105; Husband - 115; Couple - 110.

None of these scores fall within the distressed range and the Husband's score is around the mean for happily married couples (114.5). The Wife endorsed items indicating that she confides in her husband "most of the time", that she has "never" considered leaving him, that she is "happy" in her relationship, and that she "wants very much for it to succeed and will do all she can to see that it does". The Husband indicated that he confides in his wife "most of the time", that he has "never" considered leaving her, that he is "very happy" in his relationship, and that he "wants very much for it to succeed and will do all he can to see that it does".



## Appendix C

## WRITTEN PROTOCOLS

In transcribing the written protocols we have replaced names with symbols according to the following code: W replaces the name of the writer's wife, and H replaces the name of the writer's husband.

Wife of Couple No. 1

I had a dream where I was making love to my father as a young, handsome man. I enjoyed it and felt no guilt or reservation. When I awoke I was for the first time in months eager and aroused enough to wake H to make love. I had the impression from this that my father is to some extent responsible for some of my lack of interest in sex. When I was able to be attracted rather than repulsed by my father sexually, I was more freed than usual to make love to H.

Husband of Couple No. 1

I have some difficulty doing the "autopsy" of one situation to enhance specific points related to the abuse. Instead I find most of the impacts of the abuse occur in a subtle way, in day to day situations, where often the abuse related response is difficult to distinguish from "personality" or from her personal (sic.) history. The abuse becomes part of the abused history!

One of the most frequent situations that make me believe is a result of the abuse is a general lack of trust. Most often this lack of trust is directed towards strangers but I feel frequently that decisions involving W & I are taken to minimize her dependency on me: not letting me choose a different road to reach a known destination, requesting many times if I will do something, having an outstanding fit if I make a wrong decision that impact (sic.) on us. She can't take control on (sic.) everything quite evidently and I'll always make some mistakes regardless of my willing to get better and more cautious. Therefore this is an area we both have to come to concrete agreement.

Another area of frequent daily situations is her body image and also in a more general sense her image from the others' mind (sic.). I find it very difficult to assess how much the abuse impacted these two items but I am almost sure that it created a rupture in providing her with a good and realistic perception of herself. It shows in the long hours disliking her body, fussing with clothes which always make her look ugly (according to her). Also she can be outrageously (sic.) chocked (sic.) by one comment

somebody may say and disregard the whole evening of conversation: the focus will often be place solely on this negative point (or pretend negative point). I think the feeling of being betrayed invade (sic) her.

#### Wife of Couple No 2

I've always been very nervous around men. When I met H, I felt very comfortable and safe. He is a very gentle man. He doesn't want to be macho and controlling. His shyness was sweet and I wanted to cuddle him and take care of him. His feminine qualities such as gentleness, caring, liking beautiful things like flowers and nice drapes, really attracted me. He was the opposit (sic.) of what my Dad was. He is not a handy man and likes to read. I think it's the differences that made me feel so comfortable. I've never experienced such intimacy with anyone else. The downside is that this comfort allowed for the flashbacks to begin. They occurred firstly during forplay (sic.). My father's presence was very really, he seemed just there, on top of me. I'd open my eyes to make it go away. It was so overwhelming that I'd just push H away. "Off of me". Those flashbacks were really interfering with our sex life. H's caring attitude was what perpetuated the flashbacks in the sense that he didn't make me feel like I should stuff my feelings. Although I was afraid to talk about it I knew he cared and somehow understood. I didn't know what to say, how to say, what he could do to help. Those flashbacks have about disappeared - not all.

There are many triggers during the day that cause me difficulties. One day H cut off his mustache (sic.) and I could (sic.) help be (sic.) reminded of my father. It's scary having the person you are uncomfortable, even scared of present in your home. Workboots, some french expressions, blue work shirts, gardening, hammering etc., they are all triggers that I find are very hard to manage and very exhausting.

I remember when we were painting the house before we moved in. I was pregnant at the time, so I didn't stay long. I asked H to take a break, so we sat down on the floor, started to kiss and Wham! full blown flashback! I ran out crying and scared. The situation. The workboots, the blue workshirt, the sweat, the prickly beard, the kiss, the job, taking a break! Wham!

#### Husband of Couple No. 2

The best description I can give is that we are living on a roller-coaster of emotions. One second up, the other down with the "woosh!" of excitement and the thunderous roar in my ears, I pray for peace yet thrill at the sparks as they fly ...

But of course, it isn't allways fun and sometimes I despair because it gets too heavy, too sad, too negative. We have a rough time fighting off our personal demons and our relationship and our personal happiness suffers for it.

I sometimes find myself deep into an argument that makes no sense to me. The irrationality of the argument can sometimes ring an alarm bell in my head and helps me realise that we are actually re-playing some past trauma of Ws. I usually put a stop to the fight, let W cry, and then comfort her somehow. She usually feels very remorseful after an "anger-event" and needs reassurance. These fights are diminishing in frequency and intensity. Often they are about "control". This is when she feels I am trying to dominate her. I do this often. Sometimes she complies willingly, other times, it's world war.

I am an impulsive person when I am happy, and this often results in my saying things that are meant to be taken as a joke but if said angrily, or seriously, would be quite offensive. I take chances sometimes. It blows up in my face sometimes.

W needs a lot of care and attention. She used to crowd me a bit because she just had to be with me evry minute of the day. I guess she wanted protection and reassurance.

When she began therapy a few years ago, anger started to show up in her personality. She was very angry and impatient. At herself mostly, but projected out to anything and evrything, including little ol' me.

Being with W is challenging, but there are plenty of breakthroughs to make it all worthwhile. I see her as going through a whole new childhood. I forgive her mistakes. She needs someone to judge her less severely than herself.

She is a workaholic, one of my tasks is to get her to enjoy life in the here and now. She allways (sic.) has many projects going on in her head, but rarely has time to finish them before she moves on to another. Childhood training.

She is a perfectionist. Another tasks (sic.) is to make her see the relativity of judgement and the futility of seeking perfection.

I sometimes feel like a bull in a china shop. I have trouble being a "real man", an aggressive, physical, take charge person and yet be as open, understanding, gentle and patient as W needs me to be. We often negotiate my tolerance level. I need to say "enough's enough" from time to time.

Taking time for myself away from her is paradoxically good for the two of us. It firstly gives me time to recharge my batteries and grow up a little bit. Secondly, like it or not, W needs to become more autonomous on an emotional level.

I wouldn't give her up for the world. She makes my life infinitely more challenging and rewarding.

## Appendix D

## EXAMPLE OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS:

## TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW - WIFE OF COUPLE NO. 2

W = Wife; H = Husband; D1 = Husband's daughter from his first marriage; D2 = Daughter from this marriage; R = Researcher. Actual words from the written protocol are in capitalized form.

Discriminated Meaning Units

1. R: So, I hope you are feeling up for this.

W: It's part of my therapy and H and I are going to have to start talking anyways really about the nitty-gritties and ... I don't mean about my experience but more about what's happening between the two of us.

2. R: When I was interviewing you together, I remember that you were both so positive and then I asked you a question like, "How is the relationship right now?" and you said, "It's much more stressed". And it really struck me that you are having a rough time right now.

W: It's present and the last year or so.

3. Yeah, 'cos I've decided that I have to do something about it and stuffing it ... takes first of all too much energy ... I don't have any to give and ... I also realised that that's not the way to take care of it. There are proper channels and I'm willing to go through that.

Transformed Meaning Units

1. W regards talking about her relationship with R as part of her therapy and timely in that she and H need to take a hard look at their relationship.

2. R reflects that, although H and W were optimistic when they were interviewed together, W also reported the relationship was more stressed than usual. W now adds she has been having a difficult time for the past year or two.

3. W has decided to make an effort to resolve recent relational difficulties. She knows suppressing her feelings is unwise, besides which trying to do so depletes her of what little energy she has.

4. R: What do you feel you need for yourself in this relationship right now?

W: Right at this moment?

R: Well at this time of your life, I guess.

W: Um ...

R: Do you have a sense of that?

W: That's always hard ... knowing what I need ... um ...

5. I would like to have some security. I don't mean ... well financially, yes, but that doesn't apply to this. Security that H is solid enough to handle it.

6. R: Yes. You wrote THIS IS THE TEST, I NEED TO KNOW IF HE'S GOING TO BE THERE FOR ME. And my sense is that this whole business with the men's group has thrown everything up in the air for you and you don't know how much he is able to be there for you.

W: That's right. That's right.

7. Because what's happened in this group is that the men stay with the men and they help each other out and the women are with the women. Now he's not specific about these things. But in the round about way that he tells me things, I know, I'm sure. I know that that's the way it is, because he keeps telling me, he says, "Why don't you go and see a girlfriend". He's never told me that. He's starting to do that now. "Why don't you go and see F" F was part of the women's weekend.

4. Asked what she needs from her relationship these days, W demurs, confessing it is hard for her to be clear about her own desires.

5. However, she wishes she could feel more secure that H is solidly grounded enough to work through relational difficulties with her.

6. W affirms R's reflection that H's experience with the men's group has thrown everything up in the air for W so that she can no longer trust he will be emotionally present and available to her.

7. Although H remains vague, W has the sense that the men's group advocates men helping other men and women helping women. For the first time, he has begun to urge W to discuss issues with her woman friends.

8. So I kind of resent the fact that he's ... he's like pushing me away, like, "It's not my domain. I'm a man". And he's also said that, though, that, "I'm not a woman. I can't understand women".

9. And it's "Whoa, wait a minute ... doesn't make any sense". H's the most sensitive and understanding man that I've ever known. And he's read psychology books, you name it, that would fill this entire house, I mean, you can tell.

10. So I have to say that this men's thing ... and it's all hush-hush. It's all secret.

R: What's that like for you, the secrecy?

W: Ugh. I can't stand it. I can't stand it.

11. I respect the fact that there are things that go on in his group ... he can't identify people. But he's not even prepared to express what it did for him. Because he's a black or white. You're, you're completely ... You don't say anything at all or you tell it all. It's He's having a problem with this (sighs). So he's keeping everything secret.

12. He keeps saying, "You'll see. You'll see." I'll see what? He's gone through a transition, a major change in his life (D2 calling her mother. Tape stopped).

8. W resents that H seems to be pushing her away, rationalising this by telling her that he is a man and so cannot understand women.

9. His statements have caught W off guard and make no sense to her, given that H is the most understanding and sensitive man she has ever known, besides being psychologically well-informed.

10. W holds the men's group responsible for this change in H and finds the secrecy with which the group operates most abhorrent.

11. W respects the need for confidentiality about names of group members but feels H has gone overboard in his determination to tell her nothing - not even how he benefits from being in the group.

12. W is filled with trepidation when H tells her "You'll see" wondering what these major changes will mean for her.

13. R: We were talking about how hard it is that H has secrets for you, is not telling you about himself in the way he used to, and is pushing you off to talk to your girlfriends.

W: That's right. That's right.

14. Because his ... The theory is ... what he's learned in his men's group is that men help men and they understand each other because they're men and he can't possibly understand a woman. And that's kind of ... It's like he's thrown his hands up. It's almost like watching his hands and saying, "I'm almost relieved now. This is hard".

15. Like he didn't say it, but, you know, I get the impression. And I know this is hard on him and, "You didn't say it. You didn't say it". He says it backwards kind of ways, but ...

16. And I just feel a little bit abandoned because he's, "I'm a man. I can't help you with that". And he's been my best friend.

17. So the whole weekend changed that entirely.

18. Now, I know he has to find himself in that ... I think that's great and I wouldn't ... If I could go back and change it, I wouldn't, but it's hard.

19. R: It feels like you have lost something?

W: In a sense. It does feel different.

13. After W returns from taking care of her daughter, R summarises (and W affirms) that she and W have been discussing how difficult it is for W now that H has secrets from her, no longer reveals himself to her as he used to, and pushes her off to talk to other women.

14. W suspects H adopted the notion that men cannot understand women, with some relief. She believes he has been finding it hard work trying to understand her and this has let him off the hook.

15. W acknowledges H has not talked about this with her, but this is the impression she receives from the odd way he has been behaving.

16. When H tells her, "I'm a man. I can't help you with that", W feels she has been abandoned by her best friend.

17. W believes, the weekend completely changed the nature of her relationship with H.

18. Although it has been hard on her, W understands and applauds H's desire to discover himself and would not deny him this experience if she could turn back the clock.

19. R seeks to clarify whether W has a feeling of loss and W affirms this, saying their relationship feels different.



20. Like he says he's there to support me but I think when things really come down to it ... Like, I'm afraid now to test the waters because things have changed and ... Like I tell ... I keep asking him, "What exactly do you mean? Can I just come over and talk to you? Are you going to be there for me?"

21. He says, "Well most of the time" Most of the time is not good enough for me. That makes me feel insecure.

22. That makes me feel like, "How'm I going to know if he's ready or not?" I mean, if I need to talk is it just about certain things? Is it just ...? Well how do I know what's right to talk about or when he's ready or not.

23. And that's new stuff, I have to talk ... We have to sort that out.

24. So that makes me feel insecure because I needed complete security in order to share things with him about my abuse. That in particular is ... That's what I need - complete security.

25. R: That he will always be there for you.

W: Yeah, yeah, exactly. I don't want the door closed on me.

26. I mean there are times that you have arguments about things that you really don't want to argue about and say, "Hey, we'll take it ... We'll talk about it tomorrow" and stuff like that.

20. H claims he is there to support her but W is afraid to test the waters because she experiences a gulf between them which was not there before.

21. When asked, H tells her that she will be able to count on him "most of the time". This qualified response leaves W feeling insecure.

22. W is confused about what new limits H has set for himself and no longer feels she can talk to him about anything at any time, as she used to.

23. She feels an urgency to have this situation discussed and clarified between them.

24. W has lost her all-enfolding feeling of security with H, which first enabled her to reveal and share her abuse experience.

25. It frightens W that H, who in her perception was always available to her, might not be there for her when she needs him most.

26. She adds that this is not to deny the wisdom of putting some contentious issues on hold for a while.

27. But not when it comes to that situation, because it takes so much out of me already to talk about it. I pick and choose my times, you know. I try to.

28. Otherwise I try to ... How can I say this? Because I don't feel comfortable about it. I try to keep it to myself or ... I try to control it in some way. Unfortunately I don't think that's always possible.

29. So, I'm feeling like it's ... Where I controlled it almost 100% before, now I don't. I have a lot of control over when my ... let's say my flashbacks ... I don't know what ...

30. See, I wish I was in H's shoes so I could see it better. But I know that I over-react sometimes to things and it has to do with that, but I'm not really aware of it. It's, it's ... and he could be a great help.

R: Now you have some uncertainty about whether he will be there.

31. W: It's a confusing message he's giving me. He says, "You can trust me" but then when it comes down to specifics, he's not always going to be there. It's, "You can trust me but I won't make the effort" or I'm not sure what the message is.

R: That's what I hear, that you're not sure.

32. W: Right. 'Cos it's like living with a new person.

27. But when she needs to talk to H about her abuse, she has already carefully chosen the time knowing how emotionally draining this will be.

28. It is so uncomfortable for her to talk about the abuse that she often tries to keep it to herself or stop herself from thinking about it, although this is not always possible.

29. W no longer suppresses her past but, neither does it overwhelm her. Currently, she feels she has considerable control over the intrusion of "flashbacks".

30. H has helped her realise that she can become excessively emotional when reliving her abuse experience. But, at the time, she is unaware of this and she wants H to continue helping her with his insights.

31. Lately, W has been confused about H's intentions. He tells her she can trust him but he also seems to want to limit the extent of his availability and willingness to respond.

32. For W, it has been like living with a new person.

33. He has all these new theories about what a man's role is, which I don't agree. I don't think there's a man's role and a woman's role.

34. But I have to rediscover this the hard way 'cos he can't divulge these things to me for some reason. There's a reason for it but I don't understand why he can't tell me what these things are all about.

R: You just have to wait and see what happens, is that the sense you get?

35. W: Wait. Yeah. Wait and you'll see. So that doesn't explain anything to me.

36. So part is relearning trust, which is a big issue between the two of us.

37. Like I trust him in most ways ... but ... but there are times when I don't want to trust him.

R: Can you give me an example?

W: When it comes to responsibilities with the house or with the kids, I find he's not as responsible as I am. He's not going to watch the kids as closely as I am. He'll forget to do important things regarding the household duties. I can tell him ... like yesterday I told him three times during the day, I said, "You have an appointment at four" and he forgot about it. (\*) And he still forgot.

33. Since the weekend, H has been full of theories about the appropriate roles of men and women and W strongly disagrees with him on this.

34. To make matters worse, W has been left to guess about his rationale for espousing these theories because (incomprehensibly to her) H says he cannot tell her.

35. Being told by H to "wait and see" has left her completely in the dark.

36. She feels she will have to learn to trust H again and this is a major bone of contention between them.

37. W maintains that she trusts H in many ways but not when it comes to domestic responsibilities. He tends to forget appointments, even when reminded, and is not as vigilant as she is with the children.

38. He's almost always been that way, but in that sense I can't rely on him. So that's part of trust though. Because if he's responsible towards these things I can trust him in that sense. I mean it's not just ... not just one area that's important, it's all the areas that are important. So it slacks a bit like that.

39. Like I mean, he's devoted to his kids but ... you know there's ... D2 will get into stuff and he will have fallen asleep on the sofa. Now D2's getting older but he's not ... see ... I wouldn't, I couldn't do that.

40. R: I'm wondering how that impacts on you, to be with someone you don't feel is responsible in that way.

W: It makes me feel insecure. Because I don't feel my kids are as safe as they should be.

41. And then I used to think, "Well maybe I'm overdoing it". See, I have to ... because ... he always tells me, "Well, don't be worried. There's nothing wrong. She was not going to get killed here". Like I'm over-protective as well with D2, want to make sure she's, you know, happy and all those things and safe. You know I wouldn't let her cross the street by herself, not at that age anyways.

38. H has always been lackadaisical and W feels she cannot rely on him. For her, being responsible, in the way she means it, is one aspect of overall trustworthiness and H does not qualify.

39. She acknowledges that H is devoted to his children but, for instance, he will fall asleep when he is supposed to be watching their youngest child, something W could never do.

40. His behaviour leaves W feeling insecure and concerned that the children are not as safe as they should be.

41. Sometimes W wonders whether she is overly vigilant and too protective of her daughter, wanting to ensure her happiness and safety at all times. H constantly tells her not to worry so much.

42. And I'm over-protective where he's ... very very slack. So when the two of us ... when we meet like that ... where I come home and there's a ... you know, there's a pile of toilet paper in the toilet, you know, and, "What's this?" you know, and, "Oh it must have been when I fell asleep".

43. Well, jeesh, you know, it makes me insecure. It makes me feel like that's one more thing that I should be controlling 'cos I can't trust.

R: So you are left feeling you should really be there at all times ...

44. W: 'Cos she's my daughter.

R: And he's not watching carefully enough.

W: As careful. So it makes me uncomfortable and makes me feel ...

R: Her safety is so important to you.

45. W: Her safety is my responsibility. Now I know he's her father, but he hasn't shown complete responsibility like that. He's a whole lot more slack than I am. I see that as responsibility, 'cos I take my responsibility for my child very seriously ... so I ...

42. W owns that she is over-protective but contends that H is "very very slack" and this causes conflicts when, for instance, she returns home and discovers what their daughter has been up to while he slept.

43. This makes W feel insecure and as if it is one more area that she should control because she cannot trust H.

44. W is uncomfortable when she knows her daughter is with H who is not as careful as she is.

45. W assumes full responsibility for the safety of her daughter, but she feels H is less responsible and more casual than she is.

46. ... maybe too much. So we may be kind of opposites from that. Maybe there's a happy middle, I'm not sure. 'Cos I'm always questioning whether I'm too serious about it and whether he's too slack. It makes ... it confuses me, it makes me feel insecure, it makes me angry because, "How could you do that, you know? How could ... it's your own daughter, you know?"

47. But it has to do with trust as well and that's where the biggest impact is, is trust. I can't trust him.

R: You don't feel you can trust him.

48. You have been talking about areas in which you don't feel you can trust H but I remember that when we first met you said you have always trusted that H will "be there" for you. Now you seem to be not so sure about that.

49. W: Yeah, it's taking ... Yeah, yeah, because I don't even know who I'm dealing with any more. He says he's the same person, but then on the other hand, he says he's a different man. It's like water in my hands. It doesn't make sense. I can't get a grasp of what is going on in his head, I really just can't, I just ...

46. Sometimes she wonders if she and H represent opposites with her being overly responsible and serious while H is not responsible enough. His casual attitude confuses and leaves her feeling angry and apprehensive.

47. Most significantly, W no longer feels she can trust him to take responsibility care of their daughter.

48. R reminds W that earlier she said she always trusted that H would "be there" for her. Now she seems less certain.

49. W feels she no longer knows H. He conveys to her the ambiguous message that he is the same person yet a different man. W cannot grasp this; for her it is like water in her hands.

50. R: And what is it like for you to be with him now? How do you find things are between you?

W: I think I go through a lot of emotions. I go through a lot of anger because, "Why don't you just tell me? Tell me what you're all about."

50. Asked to describe being with H these days, W replies that she feels many emotions. Above all, she is angry with H because it seems he presently no longer confides in her or allows her into his private world.

51. I'm not talking about the secrets the guys shared because that's none of my business. I don't need to know that.

51. She does not expect him to divulge the secrets of the other men.

52. But he is holding back for some reason and I don't know why. It has to do with this male bonding thing and I think it's unfair to me.

52. W suspects H is holding himself back from her because of his new bond with the men in his group and this feels unfair and disloyal to her.

53. It's a ... he's chosen between the two of us because I don't think the guys have asked him not to talk about it. I think he's chosen not to talk about it for some reason.

53. She infers H has deliberately chosen to share his private world with the men in his group and to exclude her from it, not because secrecy was mandated but for some reason of his own.

54. R: How do you make sense of that, that he won't talk about it with you?

W: There's lots of possibilities. He could be sending me messages that he's closed off. He's trying to ... maybe, I don't know, I'm not sure ... maybe he's trying to get some time of his own here, trying to separate from me, 'cos we do everything together, and maybe he's doing that in a big way.

54. Asked what meaning she attributes to this, W surmises H may be showing her he feels emotionally closed off from her, or, perhaps just that he needs some time and space for himself.

55. And if he doesn't talk to me about stuff, then he's not sharing that, so he's kind of got his own life.

56. Possibly that's what he's trying to do. It's like the pendulum is going really far this way.

57. And as long as I know what that's all about then I would be ... I hate it when people are not telling me stuff or when they're not frank with me, or ...

58. R: Can you tell me more about that?

W: It's all insecurity. It's all insecurity. What is going on in their heads? And since I was a kid, I always wanted to read people's minds and wished I could, because I could never ... It was always kind of hard to figure out what people really meant.

59. And that's kind of ... I'm sure ... I'm sure that H and I still have a long way to go in our conversations and our sharing and it's coming along.

60. But not sharing that big part of his life is like ... I don't think it has to do with trust in me, I think it has to do with separating from me, but he's chosen not to share with me.

61. I don't know ... it's ... the flow has stopped. Because what felt good to me was that I could share stuff, he could share stuff, and now there's nothing coming back from him.

55. She wonders if H is creating a separate life for himself.

56. If so this would be an extreme move away from the intense closeness of their shared life together.

57. W contends that if only H would include her and share what he was about, she could accept this; she abhors being deceived or kept in the dark.

58. W attributes this to never feeling truly secure. Since childhood she has wished she could read other people's minds so that she could know what they were really thinking and intending.

59. W sensed she and H were growing closer in their sharing and their mutual dialogue.

60. But she suspects H has chosen to exclude her from a very important aspect of his life, not because he does not trust her, but in order to separate himself from her.

61. W treasured the mutuality of all they shared, but now it feels to her as if "nothing is coming back" from H; "the flow has stopped".



62. R: So the not sharing? Does that leave you feeling a bit shut out?

W: Not completely.

R: Just from this part?

W: Yeah, this part. And I think it's important because it's all about him.

63. And I married him. I married a H. An H that I thought I knew. So it's almost like living with a stranger. I don't know if I'm living with a different man than I thought I married.

64. He thinks he's a better man now too. He wished he would have taken the weekend first and then been married, and I don't understand what that means. But I think ...

65. 'cos I don't want him to change, in the sense that I liked certain things about him. He was gentle, he was open, he was ... I don't know ... he was all the things that made me feel secure.

66. And now it's, "phew". It's something altogether different. And I'm making negative assumptions that it's going to be ... he's gonna ... you know ... maybe start pushing me around ... um ... being ... not rough as in physically, but being tough with me.

62. Asked whether she feels shut out by H, W answers that she only feels shut out of his new secret life with men. But, if this is where H is formulating his new sense of himself, then being excluded has huge significance for her.

63. W married H, thinking she knew and loved him for who he was. Now she feels as if she is living with a stranger and wonders if this is a different man from the one she married.

64. H contends he is a better man now and wishes he could have undergone the changes wrought by the weekend before getting married. W does not understand what he means by this.

65. She is clear that she does not want H to change. She liked the way he was gentle and self-revealing; everything about him helped her feel secure.

66. W is frightened that H may have radically changed. She is making pessimistic assumptions that he is going to be tough-minded and try to dominate and control her (although she does not fear he will be rough with her physically).

67. R: How have you experienced that with him?

W: Well (slightly doubtful tone). We went camping for three days and it was part of this trust business, 'cos we left in a hurry and I said, "Well we can't go without this and we can't go without that" (anxious tone). And he says, "Let's just go. We have a tent. We'll make up all the rest". "OK. Alright. Maybe I'm too serious about this. Alright. OK. We'll figure it out". So we left.

68. And on the third day I just said, "Look I've had my limit of trust" (laughs).

69. And I was wondering about the weather because it was storm ... it was going ... they were calling for thunder storms ... and I said, "In a tent?" and we hadn't sealed the seams and, you know, just took off like that. We didn't have a tarp. We weren't ready for no rain and I had kids and this was my first time camping with kids.

67. Asked how she has experienced the changes in H, W mentions an incident which illustrates her current lack of trust. W was anxious about being ill-equipped for a family camping trip, whereas H was confident they could extemporize if necessary. W, trying be more trusting and take matters of safety less seriously, suppressed her reservations.

68. But by the third day, W could no longer tolerate trusting H to make responsible decisions.

69. A thunder storm was forecast and W feared that, thanks to H's cavalier attitude, they were ill-equipped to weather it. She felt special concern for the children.

70. And ... um ... I didn't know how to tell him that I wanted to go home. And I just basically nit-picked a few things and said, "Well the kids shouldn't be out in the sun ... ". I mean we were in the sun for three days straight here and, "We shouldn't be out in the sun for too long."

71. But I didn't realise that what I really needed and didn't get it out straight ... I found that out later ... But I was feeling uncomfortable. I wanted some ... security. I was trying to find out how to do it.

72. We had friends in that area. I said, "Let's go visit our friends". He turned me down. He turned me down. He wasn't hearing anything. He basically ... well he was enjoying it. He was very ... very ... what's the word? ... calm. He was really enjoying it. And I was, "What about this? What about that?"

73. So basically when ... So he comes to see me and I said, "Let's ... Why don't we just get going? We can visit or something". He said, "Why do you worry so much? Why can't you just enjoy what we're doing?" I said, "Well that's my job to worry. And it's your job not to worry".

74. Well, that just blew the whole thing apart. He said, "OK. Let's go. This is no more fun. Get in the car. We're going". It was like that. It was straight out like that.

70. W did not know how to tell H that she wanted to go home. She tried to influence him indirectly by giving other reasons for leaving

71. Not until later, was W aware of her deep longing to be safe and secure; at the time she only knew she felt uncomfortable and unsure as to how to approach H.

72. In her efforts to get away, W suggested they go and visit friends but H declined. He showed no concern and W sensed he was calmly enjoying himself and ignoring her obvious anxiety.

73. When she continued to suggest they leave, H inquired why she pre-occupied herself with worrying instead of just enjoying life. W defended herself by retorting that she is compelled to carry all the concern for the family because H chooses not to carry any of it.

74. At this point all discussion ceased and H pronounced that the enjoyment had gone out of their trip. He announced they were going home and commanded the whole family to get into the car.

75. R: Was that unfamiliar, that kind of response?

W: Yes, yes, very ... very. He's usually understanding and says, you know, "What's your problem?" and "What's really going on?" And he'll put his arm around me and eventually I'll get it out.

76. But he was angry at me for ... I guess ... I don't know ... He was angry. And that set him off. Whatever was going on in his head, I'm not sure. And, by the time ... see he didn't ... I, I, I didn't understand ...

77. 'Cos he said to me, he says, "Well tell me what you want to do." And I got the impression ... I thought I was controlling everything. So I got the wrong message from him and he got the wrong message from me. Anyways, it was all mixed up.

78. By the time we got to the tent, I was having a fit, you know, I was ... 'cos I couldn't understand his attitude. He was angry and not talking, not communicating. He says, "Just tell me what you want and we'll do it." "No. Let's decide together. We're a couple here". "No." He wouldn't bite. He would just not bite. He just sat there in the car and waited.

79. And I just progressively got madder and I went ... and hid (crying) and I had a good cry ... and I was wacking the tree (laughing and crying at the same time).

75. W affirms that the way H behaved felt strange to her; given his usually affectionate way of helping her reveal her true feelings.

76. Although she was confused as to what H was thinking, W sensed H was angry with her.

77. W feels they were out of touch and miscommunicating.

78. W became increasingly upset and confused whereas H, appearing angry and non-communicative, insisted she should state her mind and he would comply. W implored him to discuss matters so that they could come to a decision as a couple, but H refused and just sat in the car waiting for her.

79. Now frustrated and furious herself, W hid behind a tree - hitting at it and sobbing.

80. I can break things, things I can break ... not things ... I wouldn't break something like that (indicates her teapot). I'd break something I can break.

81. Came back out. Asked him again to talk. And he just wouldn't budge. Just solid as a rock. So, he says, "Just tell me what you want and we'll go". So I said, "I want to go home." And he said, "OK. Let's go. Let's pack. If you're not ready in ten minutes I'm going without you."

82. He was really ... it was odd ... 'cos it's not like him.

83. So we went home and ... Oh, you know, I ... the kids were great. It was me that had a big problem. I'm the one that went home crying (laughs ruefully).

84. R: That felt really different, the way he was with you. Sounds like it scared you.

W: Oh "phew", definitely, definitely, 'cos it's not ... 'cos he's not ... he's very soft usually.

85. So he was solid like that and when we went home he basically told me, "My family wasn't ... You weren't happy. You wanted to go home and it was my duty to take my family home and that's what I did."

86. I said, "You're not my chauffeur. We have to discuss things together".

80. W admits she smashes things which have no value when she becomes very angry and upset.

81. She returned to the car and implored H to discuss matters but he was unmoved and "solid as a rock", repeating his demand that she state her mind. Finally, W said she wanted to go home and H gave the order to pack and leave, threatening if W was not ready in ten minutes he would go without her.

82. This behaviour was most uncharacteristic of H.

83. W laughs ruefully as she recalls how well the children behaved while she, their mother, went home crying and distraught.

84. W affirms R's comment that it seems H's unfamiliar behaviour scared her, and she adds that H is usually very gentle with her.

85. This time he was as solid and unbudging as a rock and, on reaching home, informed W that he considered it his duty to take his family home because they were not happy.

86. Affronted by this, W told H she wanted to be able to discuss matters with him as a mutual partner, rather than give him instructions as if he was her chauffeur.

87. He says, "I did what I had to do and I took you home. There's no hard feelings. You're the one that's going to feel bad about this not me. It's over. We had three days of camping. Let's just chalk it up to three days of camping". And he just didn't want to get into that.

88. R: And that was really different.

W: Very different. He was just, "No. Don't worry about it. It's over. It's finished. Let's just take the good stuff and finish it there".

89. So that was really tough. That was ... because I was insecure altogether over everything, so ... 'cos I was not in my own home. I was camping.

90. R: So you were really vulnerable to start with and then having H behave in such a different way ...

W: Right. Yeah. I didn't know ... I mean I didn't ... like see ... once he snapped ... once ... when I said that, I said, "It's up to me then. It's my job to worry. It's your job not to". That ... When he turned, that was it (smacks hands together). The door was closed and there was no talking to him and I knew it (laughs).

87. W reports that H merely reiterated that he had done his duty, anticipating that she might feel some remorse about her own behaviour but, as far as he was concerned, he felt no resentment and the matter was closed.

88. W found it very unusual that H remained so adamantly closed to the idea of any further discussion after a disagreement.

89. W reflects that H's strange behaviour was particularly distressing to her because, being away from her home, she was already feeling very insecure.

90. In retrospect, W thinks she pushed H over the edge when she told him that by not showing proper concern for the safety of the family he was putting all the responsibility on her shoulders. After that, H essentially slammed the door on any further discussion.

91. R: He decided something at that point.

W: Yeah. He made a decision and that's it.

He was looking like that and ... I felt like a kid ... I felt like a kid because he was ... this ... this ... I don't know ... this tall man, you know, "OK. Fine. We'll go home". You know, like I'm misbehaving or ... I don't know ... I just ... I felt like I was the kid and he was the father (laughs ruefully). I didn't like that at all.

92. So he can ... He has been a couple of times in the past but that was because he was just not ready for my attitude. But I ran into that "poof", because usually if he was like that and closed we'd usually both talk about it, you know what I'm saying?

93. But this was not the same thing. this was, "That's it" Solid brick wall. I don't know if that (unintelligible) was good or not because personally I felt alone.

94. R: Like a naughty little kid.

W: Yes. And, "I'll take you home". Exactly. Like he was my dad or something.

R: Paternal.

W: Or superior. Yeah. Yeah.

91. W recalls that H looked at her in a way that left her feeling diminished; as if she was a disobedient child in the presence of a tall stern father. She took exception to this.

92. In the past, H has sometimes refused to engage with her when she has approached him with a particularly confrontational attitude, but even on these occasions they usually managed to talk things through.

93. But on this occasion, H remained adamant like a "solid brick wall", leaving W feeling all alone and very confused.

94. W agrees with R's comment that she felt like a naughty little child, adding that H acted as if he was her father, or superior to her in some way.

95. R: Did this experience with H remind you in any way of your dad?

W: How can I describe my dad. My dad was ... He didn't talk much and what he wanted from you was work. So long as you worked he was happy with that. You had to work in a certain way. My dad was a workaholic and unfortunately I've learned his ways of working.

96. He didn't communicate. He wasn't huggy. He wasn't ... Kissing was at Xmas time or something like that.

97. He ... um ... Every now and again though, he'd ... he'd be really ... What's the word? ... friendly ...? No. What's the word? I don't know. Every now and again there was a ... peek of ... I don't know ... a real person and not this worker.

98. But then that's when the trouble started. So ...

R: That's when he came on to you?

W: Yeah, 'cos that's when he started recognising me as, I don't know what ... a woman? I don't know ... a girl? a female? I don't ... I haven't got a clue ... I haven't got a clue what that's all about.

95. Asked if anything about this recent experience with H reminded her of being with her own father, W says her father was uncommunicative and demanding, only content if everyone in the family was working. W feels she acquired her preoccupation with keeping busy from her father.

96. Her father did not converse and was not demonstratively affectionate. He only kissed his children on special occasions.

97. W struggles to describe how every now and again she would glimpse a different, and perhaps more relaxed person, than the work-obsessed man she was accustomed to.

98. Unfortunately, it was also at these times, as W's says, that "the trouble started" and her father became aware of her sexuality. She still feels completely in the dark as to whether her father perceived her as a girl, a woman or just a female when he approached her sexually.



99. And I saw it rarely. You'd have a (unintelligible) smile and he's be happy about the work we'd done. It was extremely difficult to please my dad.

100. We worked very hard, very hard, very hard, and homework came after that. I mean I could go on about the work but ...

101. R: I'm thinking about what you said about the way H said to you, "We're going home and that's that". Was your dad like that?

W: Yes. Well yes he was 'cos all he'd have to say is, "What are you doing in here?" and that was it. Everybody jumped.

102. My dad kicked me once and I'll always remember that one. I told him ... I never ... I always worked. I mean I worked.

R: You were a good kid.

W: Oh yes. I was a people pleaser, you know. And ... I remember that day. I was so fed up. I was fed up. I was fed up. I was tired, I was, you know ... And I said, you know, "What about me in this? I don't want to work all my life, you know". So I (unintelligible) told him I didn't want to go and I turned around and left and he gave me a swift kick in the behind ... my first and the last I can assure you.

99. W does not elaborate further upon the issue of her sexual abuse but goes on to relate that her father only rarely smiled to show he was pleased with the work she had done. Implicit is the sense of how conflictual these moments must have been if his approval coincided with him desiring her sexually.

100. W recalls how tremendously hard the children worked and then had their homework to do after all their chores.

101. Asked if H's statement, "We're going home and that's that" reminded her of her father, W affirms this. Her father had only to open his mouth for them all to jump to attention.

102. W recalls a day when, despite working desperately hard and trying to please, she was so tired and resentful that she told her father she did not want to perform some task. As she turned to leave, her father kicked her in the behind. W swears she will never forget this incident - the first and, she insists, the only time her father kicked her.

103. And I turned around and I said ... if my eyes could kill him, I tell you, I think I would have, I would have pushed him down those stairs (laughs ruefully), you know. Like the odd moment that I ask him to take a break, that's what I get for it.

104. So yes, he was very dominating ... um ... he controlled our time. He ... we didn't have friends ... we didn't go out, you know ... to have fun, like ... It was a rarity. We went to the beach every now and again, but it was a rare thing - once or twice a summer and that was about it. Other wise it was work.

105. And my dad didn't talk much. He just had to look. He ... those eyes, you know. He just had to look.

106. And my dad wasn't a big man, but when he ...

R: He wasn't a big man?

W: No, no ... and he didn't have to say much. We just knew. He was there, you know. It's a thumb (gesturing "get over there") like this, you know. It was amazing when I think about it. He didn't have to say much.

107. So I think, H doing that, 'cos he didn't say much, you see, he was a solid brick wall and ... I suppose I might have felt ... you know, the pinch like that, I don't know. That's possible. I think so.

103. W recalls how she turned around and gave him a look of murderous hatred. It shocked her that her father would respond so brutally to her request for a reprieve from work.

104. W views her father as very dominating. He controlled the family's time and made sure they worked constantly. They were not allowed a social life and rarely went out or had fun.

105. Her father did not speak much; W recalls that he just had to look and the expression in his eyes said everything.

106. Her father was not a big man nor did he have to say much to be obeyed. Often he would just gesture with a thumb to indicate they should get to work. Looking back, it seems extraordinary to W that they all just knew what he meant and complied.

107. W now reflects on the possibility that experiencing H as "a solid brick wall" and as not saying much might have reminded her of what it was like to be dominated by her father.

108. And times when ... I remember the other night. We were in the living room and H had worked and he was tired and I was getting D2 dressed and I was talking, "Get your pants on. Get your top on". And he was sitting there reading a book, but I didn't spot him. I didn't see him. And D1 was reading a book but ... anyways we ... he usually reads after ... after D2's in bed anyways. And this ... that night he just went like this, "Shh!" (finger to lips and angry look) like that to me.

109. Oh, I think I could have ripped off his head ... (tears in her eyes and her voice is suddenly soft, hurt and tearful).

110. Because my dad ... when he sat with my mum at the table ... when my mum served the supper, my dad would sit there and I don't know what the look was. It was communication here but there was no word said ... and he'd just have to look, "Where's my supper?"

111. And for H to just go like this "Shh!" (gestures) like that was like him giving me an order to "Shut up!" Was I ever upset.

112. I looked at him and I was going to let him have it and I said, "I can't do that in front of the kids. I just can't do that".

108. This reminds W of another recent incident. She was talking to their daughter, unaware that H was reading when he put his finger to his lips and, giving her an angry look, said, "Shh!"

109. W was enraged and felt violent towards H. As she recalls this moment, her eyes fill with hurt tears.

110. She is reminded of how her father would sit at the table saying nothing but giving her mother a fierce look which said, "Where's my supper?"

111. And so, for H to resort to signalling her to be quiet was extremely upsetting to W, reminding her of how her father silently dominated her mother.

112. At the time, W felt tempted to confront H but decided against this to spare the children.

113. But we never got through that ... we never ... again he was closed. He just didn't ... He was too tired ... He was ... I don't know what, but little things like that ... like that, "Shh!" is not H.

114. R: What would have happened before?

W: He would have been annoyed but I wouldn't have known about it. He would have said ... or he would have went to a different room or something like that. Besides that, you know, he would help ... He would help, you know. He wouldn't be reading, trying to read while we're trying to get the kids to bed, or something, like that's not his style, but that's what he was doing.

115. And I think I could have ... you know. We could have fought over that one for a long time, because he's closed, he's closed.

116. R: So he felt closed and as if he was giving you an order.

W: Yes. Right.

R: And he wasn't pitching in and helping the way he usually did.

W: That particular situation, yeah. It was the non-verbal you know.

R: Was it the look too?

W: Yeah it was. Yeah it was. He was serious, like, "Shut up, or else ..." and it was almost a ...

113. This moment of hostility was never resolved between them. H was tired and did not want to discuss the matter. But W was left feeling it was strange for H to order her to be silent in that way.

114. Asked how H would have behaved previously, W acknowledges he might have been annoyed but would probably have removed himself. More typically, he would have been helping her to get the children to bed instead of doing something for himself.

115. W has the sense it would not have been easy to resolve this issue because H seems so averse to discussion these days.

116. But what upset W most was that H ordered her to be quiet with a gesture and a look which seemed to contain a threat.

117. And it's not H. H's not ... it's not his style. It's not his ... but he's done it and I find that really odd, really odd. So I don't know ...

R: Does he know? Have you told him how scary this is for you?

118. W: (sighs) That's hard ... to talk about it. He ... well ...

119. I have to know, too, what my feelings are on it and I think before I can talk to him I have to know what my feelings are.

120. If I approach and say, "Don't talk to me like that", forget it. The door's closed. I've ruined it. I ... just with one sentence I've ruined it. It's ... There's no more talking to him, so ...

121. R: So you have to find a way to approach him ...

W: Right, right, exactly and mmm ... I don't like to have to pussyfoot around him either. I feel vulnerable enough without (laughs) trying to be careful of what he's feeling, you know.

122. Like I realise that he has feelings but, my god, I already have a hard enough time with my own stuff. Not ... you know, not to have to worry about him. You know what I mean ... We should take turns (laughs) It doesn't work like that unfortunately, but ...

117. W finds H's irregular behaviour very disconcerting.

118. She sounds despondent about the difficulties of telling H how his changed attitude and behaviour have alarmed her.

119. She senses a need to be clear about her own feelings before she confronts him.

120. W senses that if she demanded that H not speak to her as if he were giving her commands or orders, this would be enough to preclude any further discussion between them.

121. W realises she will have to approach H with care, but resents having to tread cautiously and protect his feelings when she feels so vulnerable herself.

122. This is not to deny H's feelings but when she is struggling with her own W declares, with a bitter laugh, that it would be easier if they could take turns.

123. R: It sounds like there's work to be done, things are not good for you right now.

W: No, not at all because it's very present. It's very ...

R: I can sense that ...

W: Yeah (crying) what can you do?

124. We have to get some ... some counselling based on that, I think, specifically ...

R: Together.

W: Yeah. I've always wanted to do that because you get individual counselling but where it's most tough, I think, is probably those reactions that are probably related to my past.

125. R: That come out in the relationship?

W: Sure, I'm sure they do because I have triggers like I mentioned in that ...

R: Yes you did.

W: I have so many. It's incredible. 125. W reveals that they live with the multitude of everyday situations which can trigger a re-experiencing of the sexual abuse she lived as a child.

123. W affirms, tearfully, that the relational quandary she is living feels overwhelming.

124. She feels they need counselling as a couple because, although individual therapy has been beneficial, it is when feelings which originate in her abusive past are lived out in their relationship that life is most difficult for both of them.

126. R: I was going to ask you about that. You wrote about the triggers you experience.

W: I'm more aware of them. Like it's all new to me, you know. Like I remember, years ago, one incident where I had a small trigger, but that was it. (spoken rapidly and emphatically). I was so good at dissociating that I managed it, but not now.

127. Like the blue shirts that I mentioned ... "shew" (gestures with hand to indicate tossing something out) ... they're gone. I had to. I mean, it doesn't make any sense a blue shirt should trigger me like that but it does. Some people may not understand it but ... it's a trigger, what can I say, it's a trigger. That one I can get rid of.

128. The workboots is a different story, 'cos he comes in with them but if we're working on a project ... um ... see I have to tell him and say, "Don't wear those damn boots. Wear your shoes".

129. I can't help it. I see them and it turns me back, you know, to the past.

130. Cutting the moustache ... big one, big one, big one. I didn't know that was going to happen 'cos he's never shaved off his moustache. When he ... I just told him, I said, "Don't do that again. Just leave it grow in. Don't ... I don't wanna talk about it".

126. Years ago, when she experienced an intrusion of her abuse memories, she could detach her feelings from it. Only now does she realise how effectively she kept her memories out of awareness. But she cannot do this any more, and has only recently become aware of how everyday events are reminders of her abuse and force her to re-live these painful experiences.

127. For instance, W has discarded all H's blue shirts. She recognises some might find it strange that the mere sight of a blue workshirt, such as her father use to wear, could have such a devastating effect on her. But for W, this was one "trigger" she could eliminate.

128. Workboots are another, and more problematic trigger, because H comes into the house wearing them. If she and H are working alongside, she asks him to wear shoes instead.

129. W has only to see H's workboots to be reminded of her past abuse.

130. When H shaved off his moustache, this precipitated an unexpectedly major crisis for W. She begged him to grow it again and could not even tell him how his shaven face touching hers felt like her father's.

131. R: Does he understand?

W: He doesn't understand triggers.

R: He doesn't.

W: No. He doesn't understand triggers, I don't think ... Like the moustache ... He says, "It's just a moustache. It's ...". You know, he doesn't understand the impact that it has.

132. R: Did you tell him that his shaven face reminded you of your dad?

W: We never talked about it. I didn't feel OK about it. He just ... his attitude was, "It's just a moustache. What's the big deal".

R: That stopped you?

W: That's right. That's right.

131. Asked whether H comprehends how powerfully she is affected by these triggers, W answers that she feels he does not fully understand because he makes discounting comments like, "It's just a moustache ..."

132. When H said this, W felt there was no point in pursuing the matter.



133. So unfortunately I have to deal with each trigger as they come up.

134. And the work ... like my little project, that window (W was working on a window when R arrived) ... that was my project. I'm the renovator. That's what I've done all my life, you know, H doesn't know anything about that stuff.

R: He's not a handy man, you said.

135. W: ... at all, at all. And that's fine 'cos he's my helper. I need extra hands, I need his strong arms ...

136. ... but that was a big effort, a big effort (starts to cry).

137. How do I keep (crying)... How do I keep it out? His image ... his ... I don't know ... How do you describe it? His ghost. I don't know what it is ... his ghost ... it's there at different times. He intrudes in my home. I don't know how to keep him out (laughs sadly).

138. It's a lot of work to separate this stuff ... I don't know what it is, I ... I don't know how to manage it.

133. W feels she has no choice but to wrestle with each new trigger as she becomes aware of it.

134. Just working with her hands, as she has done all her life, can bring to mind her father.

135. H is not a skilled handyman but this suits W who instead relies on him for his strength.

136. W cries as she recalls a renovation project which was much more onerous than it needed to be because so many memories were stirred up while she worked.

137. Crying, W struggles to tell how the ghostlike presence of her father invades her home and she does not know how to banish him from her life-world.

138. W has worked hard to discern when intrusions come from her past abuse. She is at a loss as to how to endure them.

139. And he's come to my home. He's done a job. I kind of swallowed my pride 'cos I'm not decided whether I want to keep in friendships with my dad or not ... and, you know, that was a really tough day, you know. He slept in my home ... and he was in my home ... and you know, it's not my house any more ... He's been here.

140. I envision in my head that I could wash all these walls.

R: You need to wash ...

W: Do you understand what I mean about feeling dirty? I often feel dirty.

R: Yeah, yeah.

W: I wish it was possible to wash away his ... It doesn't work, I can assure you. I have ...

141. You know what Mr. Dressup looks like?

R: No.

W: It's my dad. It's like that. Mr. Dressup. Mr. Dressup bothers me, believe it or not.

142. It is so tiring every day.

139. W agreed to her father doing some work on their house despite her ambivalence about maintaining contact with him. Having him spend the night under her roof was extremely difficult for her and deprived her of the reassuring sense that her home is her own.

140. W felt dirty and contaminated and wished she could expunge her father's presence by washing all the walls in the house.

141. W is astounded by how distressed she can become at the sight of a television personality who happens to look like her father.

142. Assailed by her memories, W's days are exhausting.

143. See I get mad because I feel more powerful being that ...

R: Yes I remember, you told me ... you feel stronger ...

W: Right, so it's not (unclear). So I'm often mad.

R: To keep feeling strong, you said.

W: Exactly. Exactly. (W's voice is stronger and she has stopped crying).

144. You see, H is starting to get stronger. He's starting to be this brick wall. I think it's that balance again, that he's up here (holds her hand above her head) ... the brick wall and I'm feeling weaker.

145. It's made me more like a ... maybe like a teeter-totter, maybe it's that.

146. And I told H, just recently, I said, "I'm tired of being tough. I'm tough for me. I'm tough for the kids."

R: Sounds exhausting.

W: I don't want to be tough. Tough is not feminine. I don't feel feminine. I was tough all my life. I'd like to be gentle with my kids.

147. I can find that with my own child, but with D1 it's a different thing. Why she's a problem with... I have my problems with her, I don't understand, but I'm really like this (hand makes a chopping movement). I'm strict with her, "Do it and do it now". And I'm not sure why.

143. With a firmer voice, W says she finds it helps to become angry about events because she feels stronger and more powerful when she is enraged.

144. W has the sense that the balance in the relationship has shifted now that H is asserting himself, becoming stronger, and tending to exclude her. This has left her feeling diminished and weaker.

145. She vacillates; sometimes feeling she still holds the reins, at others that H does.

146. Recently, W confided in H that she was tired of being steely. She has had to be strong all her life and yearns to feel softer and more feminine as a woman, and gentler as a mother.

147. She can be gentle with her own child but for some reason she is very strict and hard on H's daughter, and this puzzles her.

148. It probably has to do with my childhood again ... the way dad was, you know. He was very unforgiving. I don't make her work, I mean, I don't believe in that. I won't be ... a few chores here and there, but never like my dad.

149. But I have a problem with that. I spend my whole time being tough, trying to be tough, and I'm not. H is the one that figured that one out. He's the one that ... what's the word? ... found my secret. Nobody else knew that. So he's been really helpful in that sense. He says, "You know", he says, "You act tough but ..." he says, "I know you're not tough". And ...

R: You were saying that he's getting stronger and you're feeling weaker, what does that mean? The balance has shifted?

150. W: The more I fight not to be vulnerable, the angrier I am. I don't like that state ... and I have to work ... it's like keeping out ... it's like keeping out the flashbacks. I'm almost ... I'm able to do that.

151. And the further I go into this, this, whatever this exploration that ... the more vulnerable I am ... Like I'm not really that tough after all (laughing and crying at the same time).

148. W wonders if she learned her harshness from her unforgiving father, although she does not believe children should be made to work the way she was and does not demand much of H's daughter.

149. W is aware she constantly strives to convince everyone of how tough and uncompromising she is. But H uncovered her secret; he discerned that she was not as tough as she pretended to be and helped her understand this for herself.

150. W abhors feeling vulnerable and fights to avoid it, using her anger in the same way she employs it to keep intrusive memories of her sexual abuse at bay.

151. However, in healing from her sexual abuse and exploring herself more fully, W is aware she is becoming increasingly vulnerable and less able to maintain her facade of toughness.

152. And that worries me because ... being vulnerable, what does that mean? Vulnerable to everything? to people? to my emotions? to my weaknesses? Every day I face the fact that I can't do things. I can't work as hard ... don't have the energy.

153. My daughter, I think changed me. I think my daughter really precipitated it, because I thought I was a tough person, a tough parent, and when she was born ... oh ... the moment she was born, it went out the window.

154. I became over protective ... if anybody hurt her ... they'd have to answer to me. I can ... they'd be tortured ... I guarantee you.

R: Those intense feelings for her ...

155. W: Oh you can't imagine. How my dad couldn't love his kids, I don't understand ... How could he be like that ... I really don't ...

156. So I went ... completely overpowering or some ... No, that's not the word, over-protective, 'cos I don't want anything to happen to her,

157. 'cos if she has to live what I've lived ... changes everything ... changes the way you are with people ... with men.

152. Being vulnerable is new and frightening for W, she fears she may be flooded by her emotions, intruded on by others, or overwhelmed by her weaknesses. She no longer has strength and energy to work the way she used to (and by working constantly keep her past at bay).

153. The birth of her daughter radically transformed W; all her illusions about being a tough person and a tough parent "went out the window".

154. W felt fiercely protective of her baby, knowing that anyone who hurt her, would meet a horrible fate.

155. Imbued with intense love for her baby daughter, W was newly astounded that her father could be so unloving of his children and mistreat them so.

156. She realises that she is being over-protective of her child in not wanting anything untoward to happen to her.

157. W vows her daughter will never live what she lived, knowing how it radically altered her own being-in-the-world and powerfully distorted the way she is with people, particularly men.

158. Hey, I don't go into elevators with men that I don't feel comfortable with ... elevators! ... public elevators.

159. We have men in our baby-sitting co-op. One of them has come to our meetings (D2 calling, "Ma" outside the door) and I don't like it and maybe some of the men have come home early and I'm freaked out (opens the door to D2 saying, "She's not going to understand any of this but she's going to wonder why I am crying". Tape stopped while W takes care of D2).

160. R: You've given me so much. I'm wondering if maybe there is only one more question that I would like to ask you.

161. W: I'm OK with the questions. I'd rather ... See I have a problem with my mind ... I'm not always clear. I'm not sure if things are clear for you either.

162. R: I find you very clear and very present too.

W: Yeah. That's a lot of work so it's better now to get into it and get what you need rather than split it and do it another time.

158. Illustrating this, W says she is unable to get into a public elevator with certain men.

159. Also, she is extremely uncomfortable at having men join their baby-sitting co-operative and is startled and upset if a man comes home unexpectedly when she is baby-sitting his children.

160. After a break in the interview R expresses her gratitude for all that W has shared with her.

161. W says she finds it easiest to respond to questions and fears she does not always think and express herself clearly.

162. R reassures W that she finds her both clear and very present and W says that being present in this way is hard work for her.

163. R: Right. So the question I had ... I'll just read what you said. You were talking about some health problems that you had and you said that it really takes a toll on you ...the stress ... and you said, IF I WAS A PERSON THAT WAS NOT A SURVIVOR OF ABUSE I THINK I WOULD BE A DIFFERENT PERSON. MANY THINGS THAT I DO ARE NOT LIKE A PERSON WHO WASN'T ABUSED. And you say WHEN I COMPARE MYSELF TO OTHER WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED IT IS A REMARKABLE SIMILARITY. Can you tell me more about how you feel different.

W: Things are not always so clear in my mind.

163. R asks W to elaborate on how she feels different from women who have not been abused and W gives the example of finding it difficult to keep things clear in her mind.

164. Like I know, I know I worry about a lot of stuff.

R: You worry ...

164. For instance, she finds she worries excessively and constantly anticipates catastrophes.

W: I, I'm always ... I have a ... how can say that? I see things as possible catastrophes. Let's put it that way.

165. If I'm not a good mother, she'll turn out to be a bad kid. It'll be my fault. If I don't pay my bills on time ... My God they'll come knocking at my door. It's a, it's a awful thing. If I bounce a cheque ... My God what will they think of me ... some irresponsible person. What will H think if the house is always a disaster? You know ... he's going to get pissed off. He's going to say, "Enough, I've had enough of this". What if I'm mad too often? Will he leave me?

166. I'm always living in some kind of insecurity and fear. It's fear, exactly. Fear of the weather, fear of lot's of things, fear of people around me, fear of my daughter playing with some other kid at someone else's house. Who are those people? What ... that man ... is he trustworthy?

167. 'Cos I've seen horrible things happen. I've experienced horrible stuff.

168. And it's very hard for me today to live my life as a secure life, because it's always been insecure ... always insecure.

169. R: And to the extent that it is secure you have worked to make it secure.

W: I try to. And I lack the energy to do it. That's my problem.

165. W takes complete responsibility onto herself when she engages in any task, great or small, from being a wife and raising her child to keeping the house tidy and balancing her checkbook. She will settle for nothing short of perfection in whatever she does and torments herself with catastrophic fears of what will happen if she fails.

166. W feels her life has always bee pervaded by insecurity and fear, e.g. fear of the weather, of other people, of what might befall her daughter, of the untrustworthiness of men.

167. W attributes this to having witnessed and experienced so much that was horrifying.

168. In her own words W states, that because her life has always been insecure "...it's very hard for me today to live my life as a secure life..."

169. She battles to create security for herself but her energy is depleted.



170. For in order, for example, to be financially secure I'd have to be working but I won't separate from my daughter. So I'd have to babysit. Babysit (sic.) takes a lot of energy. So I'm feeling insecure because I'm not doing that part that I think needs doing.

171. I mean just my furnace ... My old furnace was 35 years old. Made a quick decision (snaps fingers). Bought a new furnace 'cos I didn't want to be cold. I've been cold. I've been cold. I've been cold.

172. Hey listen, it's a whole different chapter. I've frozen my feet, my hands off so many times when I was a kid, because of work. I'm afraid to be cold. I used to get up. It was like 50 degrees in our house in the winter, you know, getting up in the morning. You can't begin ... you know ... to understand, like, ... the kind of life I led.

173. I'm always insecure ... and especially the men. Because I don't know what kind of men they are. Are they going ...? I don't want one of the men in our group to make a pass at me. That puts me in a bad position. How'm I going to deal with that.

174. One of the men is untrustable. How do I handle that? What ...? Do I tell all the girls and say, "Don't send you kids there". I mean it is ... for that man to make one step over the line, it changes everything and it puts me in a position (sighs).

170. She and H would be more financially secure if she worked but she will not leave her daughter and working as a babysitter takes more energy than she can muster these days. Knowing she is not contributing financially compounds her insecurity.

171. Despite this, W confesses she made a snap decision to replace their old furnace because she has a terror of being cold the way she was as a child.

172. W recalls with horror having get up in an icy house and work with frozen hands and feet through the winter. She feels it would be impossible for anyone who hasn't lived it to know how awful her life was.

173. W feels she is chronically insecure, especially around men. She is always on guard in social situations in case one of the men makes a sexually advance towards her. Not only would this be devastating for her but somehow, she feels, it would reflect badly on her.

174. Intuitively W senses one of the men in their babysitting group is not trustworthy and she is in a quandary as to whether to tell the other women not to send their children to be minded by him.

175. I don't want to be the tattletale. I don't want to be the one ...

176. Like, when I told on my dad that was a tattletale. That's how I saw it - telling the secret.

177. I wasn't believed the two first times, but ...

178. But, "Just stay on your side and leave me alone, you know. Stay there".

179. And I can't control them. There's always men that are going to cross the line, no matter what.

180. Me, it was my father and I said, "My God, if my father can do it, how many other men are going to be able to do it?" That's a problem.

181. If it would have been a stranger, it would have been a stranger. It would have had some impact, but not the same as my own father. And that's the problem.

175. She does not want to be an informer.

176. She still feels some guilt and labels herself a "tattletale" for telling the secret that her father was sexually abusing her.

177. As it happened, nobody believed her the first two times she told about the abuse.

178. Ultimately, she just wants men to stay on their side of the line and leave her alone.

179. But she knows there will always be men who will cross that line, irrespective of the damage they might do, and she has no control over them.

180. In her case, it was her own father who violated her and she thought to herself, "My God, if my father can do it, how many other men are going to be able to do it?" This is the question she lives with.

181. Had it been a stranger who violated her that would have had an impact but nothing like the impact of being violated by her own father. This, for W, is the core of her problem.

182. I know, there's another girlfriend and her father crossed the line as well. And then I thought, "Oh well, it's not just my father. That's not so bad. It's not just him. He's not the only bad guy, there's other ones. But ... Oh so it's any man in that case then?" You know it took a different kind of angle ... kind of lessened the pressure on my dad because he was a real bad guy, but then, you know ... "Oh how many men now?" Like, jeez ... not so much a bad guy but most men do it, kind of idea. But, God, I live surrounded by men.

183. And H, I've already checked him out. He's passed the test. But I always live with a certain amount of insecurity. What if I'm wrong?

184. What if all my instincts ...? And I live on instincts. Ninety percent of my instincts are correct. They've ... If I listen to them, they do lead me in the right direction.

185. And I always ... Where H is concerned, I always reserve one per cent because he is a man. At least if I'm not a hundred per cent trusting then I won't get hurt. I'll always be ready. I'll be ready (slightly aggressive tone).

186. It's all part of control. It's all part of control, feeling secure. The biggest issue in my life (starts to cry again) is security and I do that through control, controlling my environment.

182. When W learned from a girlfriend that she, too, had been abused by her father it was, at first, a relief to know her father was not unique. But she quickly recognized, that although this might make her father seem less aberrant, it really meant any man could be sexually abusive. She faced that she was living in a world "surrounded by men" and had no way of knowing how many of them were potential abusers.

183. Although H has so far passed all her tests, W living her insecurely as she does, questions whether she might be wrong about him.

184. W lives by and trusts her intuition but now she is wondering whether she might have been wrong in her intuitive sense that H was trustworthy.

185. Just the fact that H is a man means W has never given him her complete trust. She always reserves a piece of her trust, to protect against hurt and she is always on guard against possible betrayal.

186. W starts to weep again as she states, "The biggest issue in my life is security". The only way she can feel secure is if she maintains control of everything and everyone around her.

187. And boy, you can't do that.

R: It isn't possible ...

W: (laughs) Exhausting ...

188. And I have to learn what I need first so I can better handle the demands that people have on me ... H's demands, D2's, people I know, because I use so much energy already, I don't have a lot left.

189. And boy I would like to be able to one day free myself, 'cos it's like chains.

190. And I used to be called ... What was my nickname? Why has it escaped me? Smiley. That used to be my nickname. Now I lost that nickname (sad little laugh) at one point. It used to be Smiley.

191. But what I did was stuff, ay? I stuffed it. I mean people didn't know. People didn't know what was going on in my head. And I stuffed it. Even me, even me ...

192. R: You did such a good job.

W: Yeah I did, and it served its purpose. I survived up 'til now.

193. But now I have to do the work and it's hard to be smiling. And it's hard ... I do a lot of work to hide it, but I don't do it very efficiently.

187. But, W knows she cannot do this. Nevertheless, she tries and is exhausted by the effort.

188. W feels she has to become aware of and pay attention to her own needs so that she can balance these with the demands of others in her life. She is exhausting herself taking care of others and feels depleted.

189. She feels enchained by her responsibilities and yearns to free herself from them.

190. W recalls, sadly, that her nickname used to be Smiley but people stopped calling her that after a while.

191. She learned how to force her suffering out of her awareness. Nobody, not even W herself, knew what anguish lay hidden behind her smile.

192. Shutting out her true feelings like this served the purpose of enabling W to survive.

193. But now that she has to do the work of healing, it is hard to keep smiling. She struggles to hide her suffering but no longer succeeds as she used to.

194. I reach out more often now, and like, um, a friend's been really helpful in this. And, identifying with her, I see a lot of me in her and I can see how she tries to control things as well. And I say, "My God, that's me, you know". Like, I would have denied that I was a controller but I can see ...

195. R: You can see it in her and you sense it comes from the same place?

W: Yes exactly, it's feeling insecure and you do it automatically.

196. R: So that's something that you see, that similarity you were talking about earlier.

W: That's important for me because I feel odd. I feel different than everybody else in a sense. I feel the same and I feel different at the same time.

197. I've also worked hard to find common things with people that haven't been abused, like maybe about kids, how we feel about kids, how we feel about being home. I can share ... I can pretty well have a conversation with just about any woman and find something in it.

194. W now more often seeks support from others, especially a friend who was also sexually abused by her father. Noting how this woman tries to control everything, has made W aware of this tendency in herself, whereas before she might have denied it.

195. W senses that, like herself, her friend instinctively tries to control her life-world because she feels so desperately insecure.

196. W values this feeling of commonality with her friend because, with other women, she tends to feel similar in some respects but mostly odd and different.

197. W has worked hard to establish common ground with women who have not been abused and finds she can communicate with most of them on topics like children and domestic life.

198. But I feel that a person who hasn't been abused may not understand my situation. They can try and that's great, I think that's great ...

R: But that's as far as it goes. How far can you go into someone else's experience? In a way you have to also live it to really know it.

W: Exactly, like nobody ... Yeah.

199. I know a girlfriend in particular, I was telling her that I was working on this and she says, "Why? That happened fifteen, twenty years ago, you know." And I ... (sighs), "But that's what I have to do".

200. I don't want to justify it to her. I was hoping she would understand.

201. And I think it was something that had to do with her own ... 'cos I think her grandfather might have abused her and she's maybe denying it. I don't really know..

R: She wants to believe you can leave it behind you.

W: Exactly.

198. However, she believes, no matter how hard they try, people who have not been abused cannot really understand her lived experience.

199. For example, W told a woman friend that she was working on her sexual abuse issues. This woman asked why, given that it all happened so long ago. She clearly did not understand that W feels she has no choice but to do this work.

200. W did not want to justify her actions to someone she had hoped would understand.

201. W suspects that this woman may be minimizing the impact of sexual abuse because of her own history of possible abuse.

202. So I think I'm caught between feeling the same and feeling different because I'm insecure. I try to control things, I'm stressed a lot, I may be alright one hour and not the other, I go through a roller coaster, I worry about things that other people don't worry about, you know ...

203. Like some women don't care if there's a man in the group, that come to the meetings. Like one man, he's at home. He takes care of the baby and she's off at work. But that took me for a loop. I couldn't stand it. I said, "My God, it's a man. It's a women's group. I don't want a man in there". But, "My God, I'm being unfair, because he needs to be part of the group. He's the one that's taking ..."

204. And I haven't resolved that. He ... But it's fixed itself. They're leaving, they're leaving the group.

205. But some people don't worry about that. I talked to some other girlfriends, "How do you feel about a man in the group?" Some say, "Well I prefer it's all women". But that's because they like to chitchat like women, you know, talk about the drapes, you know, and men don't care about that normally.

202. Despite some commonalities with other women, W senses her extreme insecurity sets her apart from them. Also, she is different in the extent to which she tries to control everything, in how distressed she is, in how she lives on a roller coaster of emotions, and in the extent to which she is plagued by concerns which do not trouble those who have not been abused.

203. For instance, some of the women in her baby-sitting group, are quite relaxed about having a man join them. But this threw W off-balance. She did not want a man in the group but, at the same time, castigated herself for being unfair about his need and right to be there.

204. She never resolved this but fortunately for her he and his family are leaving the group.

205. For some women, having a man in the group was not an issue. When she inquired, some said they preferred an all women's group but W suspects this was because they felt freer to chat about domestic topics without a man around.

206. R: And some women might actually enjoy having a man ...

W: Yeah, you get a different point of view that's missing. They're really open. But I can assure you, those are not women that were abused. I'm positive.

207. So in a sense I'd like to section myself off and just be with those women that truly understand me. But another part of me says, "I don't want to be labelled - this is a woman who has been abused and she belongs in that group". I want to be part of society and all the women.

208. Because being abused means to me that I'm less of what I could be, you see, because I feel that I've been stuck. I feel like I've been denied, like I don't live freely. That's the word.

R: It breaks my heart to hear you say that.

209. W: And I don't know what to do about my father. I'm angry. But what would it give me to take it out on him. What would it take to relieve me of this. I can't take the baggage and say, "Here. It's yours".

R: If you could ...

W: If I could, I would have done it. I mean it's not that simple, I know it.

206. When R suggests that some women might actually enjoy having a man in a baby-sitting group, W acknowledges that men provide a different point of view. However, she is adamant that any woman open to the idea of a man baby-sitting her child is not a woman who has been sexually abused.

207. In one way, W would like to segregate herself and only be with women who truly understand her. However, she also does not want to be labelled a-woman-who-has-been-abused and confined to that group. She says, "I want to be part of society and all women".

208. Being abused means to W that she is less than she could have been. She feels mired in her past and denied the chance to be fully herself in the world. Poignantly, she states, "I don't live freely".

209. W is still unsure what to do about her father. She is angry but believes she would gain nothing by venting her feelings on him, nor would this relieve her of her suffering. If she could unload onto him all the pain she has been carrying she would but, unfortunately, it is not that simple.



210. All my reactions have to do with my childhood and my abuse, mostly my abuse, 'cos my whole body ... I have to protect my body. I have to ...

211. I'm a woman. I'm reminded of that continuously. You know, people look at me not in the face. Men look at me in the chest. I have problem with that.

212. Some women have told me that before but they don't live it the same way as I do. They don't live the fear that goes with it.

213. You know, I wish I could just, somehow, take out those experiences that I lived a child, remove them, and just live freely as an adult. I can't. It's just not possible.

214. And I think that's what makes me so ... I have high blood pressure. I have fibromyalgia. Do you know what that is?

R: No, but it sounds painful.

W: It is pain. That's what it is, it's painful. It's all the fibers, all the muscles in your body hurt. They put a name to it.

215. I know it had to do with what I'm living inside of me. It's coming out in my body. And it's really progressed, really seriously.

210. When W is with others she is conscious that she must protect her whole body. These fears about her body's vulnerability come from her childhood and particularly from her sexual abuse.

211. W is constantly reminded that she is a woman because men tend to look not at her face but at her breasts. This is very disturbing to her.

212. Other women have complained about men doing this but W feels they don't live the fear of violation the way she does.

213. She wishes she could eliminate the experiences of her abusive childhood and live freely as an adult, but she knows this is not possible.

214. W believes the anguish of her previously suppressed sexual abuse experience is now surfacing and expressing itself in bodily symptoms like high blood pressure and fibromyalgia. This is the name given to the excruciating pain she feels in all the muscles of her body.

215. W is convinced that the inner pain she is living is being expressed by her body and that this bodily pain is becoming more intense.

216. And so, what I am hoping is that if I can work through that I can redirect the stress, the energy that's trapped in there and let it out, because my body is in pain. I think that's ...

217. I don't want to have to suffer a heart attack for it, you know, I don't ... I have to raise my child. I have to. So I don't want to be stuck, and I have to do great things with her and have fun with her, you know. And I hope I never die because I always want to take care of her.

218. You know, she's ... she's special. She deserves it and I enjoy being her mother, you know.

R: Perhaps it's a way for you to have some of the childhood that you didn't have.

W: As a matter of fact, sometimes, I have to say, I do relive some of my childhood in her.

219. Stuff I didn't have, like going to the beach, you know. I mean I was conscious of that, you know, in going to the beach. I said, "You know ..." because I didn't get to the beach. You see, we went to the beach for two hours and that was it, once or twice a year. and it was always, "Have fun and hurry up", you know, and ...

220. I think that's part of the reason I could sit there on the beach. I love looking at D1 in the waves. I mean, she was having a ball. D2 playing in the sand - she rolled in the sand, she was covered in sand, she was in heaven.

216. Her hope is that, if she can resolve most of the sexual abuse issues, the pain trapped in her body will be released and her energy can be redirected towards living freely.

217. W feels it is imperative to be in good health because she has her daughter to raise and enjoy. Taking care of her is what gives W's life meaning and she wishes she could live for ever so as always to take care of her.

218. Her daughter is infinitely precious to W. She not only enjoys being her mother but also relives some of her own lost childhood through her child.

219. For instance, she rarely went to the beach as a child and when she did was expected to hasten and have her fun quickly.

220. Remembering this heightens her pleasure in sitting on the beach relishing the delight of her stepdaughter playing in the waves and her daughter rolling in the sand.

221. But me sitting there and all I could think of was, "Shit I wish I could have done that when I was a kid - freedom, total freedom".

222. And all I could ... What I'm fighting is this, "What if they get burned? What if, what if, what if they get grouchy?" You know, supper time ... "What are you going to eat?" And all that stuff.

223. And ... It's nuts. I sit there and I'm trying to debate with myself, "Stop that. Sit there and enjoy it. You're not going to be here long". It's a debate. It's a constant fight, a constant fight.

224. Like it's ... the abuse and there's the stuff that I learned as a ... the workaholic in him, the perfectionist in him. All of that's learned.

225. But the abuse unfortunately changes all of my perspective about men and how I feel safe in the world, in society.

226. I haven't been abused by women, but there are women that abuse unfortunately. Hopefully I won't learn that one day. I can deny it as long as I can (laughs).

227. But I don't feel safe around men. Men can be overpowering physically because they're bigger than you.

221. Yet, at the same time, W feels deprived and resentful, enviously wishing she could have enjoyed such total freedom as a child.

222. She finds she has to struggle not to let her tendency to be overly responsible and vigilant detract from the pleasure of the moment.

223. A constant debate rages inside her. She tells herself to just enjoy watching the children having fun but, at the same time, she is battling to come to terms with her own haranguing voices.

224. W believes she learned how to berate and torment herself in this way through being abused by, and living with, her work-driven perfectionistic father.

225. She believes her abuse radically altered her perspective on men and her ability to feel safe amongst people and in her world.

226. Although she recognises that women can also be abusers, W feels fortunate that she has neither suffered abuse from a woman nor acted abusively herself and hopes this never changes.

227. W does not feel safe around men. Because of their size they can physically overpower women.

228. H is bigger than me, I know that. I'm not tiny myself, but it doesn't matter. He's bigger than me. He's strong. He's taken Tai Kwondo.

229. He's never been forceful with me, um ... but he's a man, he's a man, you know. Can he control himself a hundred per cent?

230. The day that he crosses the line is going to destroy everything, everything, all the trust. He's had the most trust any other man's ever had, any other man. He's had 99 per cent of my trust, we'll say, in that area. And if he crosses the line, he'll destroy it.

231. And I don't know if I'm prepared to take that. Like I think I'd be destroyed to, 'cos I've poured in so much.

232. And I have a daughter as well, and if she can't trust her dad, I don't know, I just ... I can't bear that.

233. Sometimes I wonder if I should just, just, leave because I'm always living under those fears. What if I'm wrong? What if my instincts are wrong.

228. She is very aware that H is bigger and stronger than she is and has been trained in the martial arts.

229. Even though H has never used force against her, W is conscious that he is a man and fears that no man can be entirely relied upon to control himself.

230. W has given H almost all of her trust, far more than she has given any other man. But if he were ever to "cross the line" and use force against her, that would destroy everything and he would lose all her trust for ever.

231. She has poured so much of herself into this relationship that if H betrayed her in this way, W feels she too would be destroyed.

232. The notion that her beloved daughter might not be able to trust her father is unbearable to W.

233. W lives so fearfully that she sometimes wonders whether she should just leave the relationship, take her daughter, and go live on her own.

R: Sometimes it feels as if it would be simpler just to take D2 and leave?

W: Yeah. And go live on my own.

234. Because I put him through hell as well, because I'm always testing him, always putting him through tests so that he can pass them and I can feel better. It's nuts you know. I've lived with him for four years and we've talked about, God knows, everything, just about everything, you know.

235. You should think he'd have proven himself by now but ... kind of changed things for me with this weekend ... so I don't know. It's going to be really rough. In a sense, he looks stronger but in another sense he's a whole different man.

R: Feels scary.

W: Yeah, it does, it does. He's a lot stronger. I don't know. It's going to be tough (laughs).

236. R: I'm going to stop there. You've been talking for a long time and it's been hard.

234. She wonders whether this would be easier for H too. Given how much they have talked and shared during the last four years, she recognises that her chronic need to reassure herself by testing him is excessive and a little pathological.

235. H should no longer have to prove himself to her, but the weekend has changed things for W. H seems to feel stronger about himself but to her he is a different man and this scares her. She has the sense that the relationship is heading for rough waters.

236. R tells W that she is going to end the interview at this point, sensing that W is exhausted.